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Reconceptualizing the Work of a Content Provider for an Online Audience: A Case Study for How Pedagogical Strategies Can Provide Models of Engagement for Producers of Entertainment

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**RECONCEPTUALIZING THE WORK OF A CONTENT PROVIDER FOR AN ONLINE
AUDIENCE: A CASE STUDY FOR HOW PEDAGOGICAL STRATEGIES CAN
PROVIDE MODELS OF ENGAGEMENT FOR PRODUCERS OF ENTERTAINMENT**

by

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ABSTRACT

RECONCEPTUALIZING THE WORK OF A CONTENT PROVIDER FOR AN ONLINE AUDIENCE: A CASE STUDY FOR HOW PEDAGOGICAL STRATEGIES CAN PROVIDE MODELS OF ENGAGEMENT FOR PRODUCERS OF ENTERTAINMENT

Diane Cooke
Old Dominion University, 2017
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With the interconnectivity of the Internet, and the availability of affordable media compositional tools, the proliferation of online media continues to grow exponentially. However, each day is still comprised of a fixed 24 hours, with far fewer hours spent in active media consumption. Considering the global potential for content to be found (Moreville), discovered (Cormier) or spread (Jenkins), content providers are looking for ways to attract, cultivate and hopefully expand their audiences amid all this digital clutter. In the field of entertainment, this challenge is complicated when small content providers are not aligned with an online, curated network such as Netflix or Hulu. Online education has developed practices designed to communicate expectations/objectives and increase engagement. Although the outcomes/objectives between the entertainment industry and those of online education are quite different, it is possible that both industries could find commonality and share mutually beneficial approaches. Conceptualizing the audience as students might offer content providers a quicker path to assessing what their “work” is online and following a cyclical process of evaluation, as in education, offers a logical and almost narrative approach to data collection and assessment.

Using both qualitative and quantitative methods, this project examines several phases of audience activities surrounding three versions of an online animated comedy series on YouTube and a related official web page: (a) the original version created before an eLearning framework

was employed; (b) a second version six months later, where some practices were implemented; and (c) a third version six months after the second phase, which employed more changes.

Examination phases before and after the series had ended provide additional opportunities for study. The data suggest that modifying entertainment content with an educational framework helped increase audience engagement in that more viewers consumed content and participated in related creative acts. Viewership jumped after the original episode formats and webpage had been modified. However, after the main phases ended, other Internet activities also impacted viewership. This cyclical, educational framework could be useful to other small entertainment providers who struggle with social media and seek to enhance audience engagement in a cluttered social space.

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This dissertation is dedicated to my husband, Harold Buchholz, without whom neither this case study nor dissertation would have been possible.

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I, of course, must thank *Explosion Bus* creator, Tom Snyder, and producer, Katie Covett, who graciously allowed me to peek and speak into their creative process. Their generosity and patience are greatly appreciated and I am forever indebted to them for allowing me to share their process with others in this project.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

“The audience is a big, many-headed beast crouching out there in the darkness, waiting to beat us up or love us or whatever. And it must either be seduced or tamed ... And it must be dealt with.” -- Orson Welles¹

In a global society where cultural entertainment products (e.g. comedies, dramas, documentaries) are being created daily by massive numbers of production companies and individuals, both professional and amateur, and where older media does not seem to be going away thanks to online video-sharing websites such as YouTube, it becomes increasingly difficult for media consumers to discover new cultural entertainment products. Even if viewers are “Internet savvy,” and know how to focus Google search entries to yield the most direct and accurate responses, viewers also require having a sense of what is available on the Web in order to know what to search for. Finding information regarding utilitarian purposes (i.e., food, clothing, and household products) or necessary services (i.e., insurance, education, or medicine) can be difficult enough to track down on the Internet. What can be even more elusive is finding a product with abstract and subjective benefits, such as entertainment. Traditional television entertainment protocols have both advantages and disadvantages for small production companies. However, if creators are not familiar with the differences of online delivery, it might pose a challenge to them if they want their products to be discovered and their potential audience to expand. Online technologies which allow two-way communication can assist in spreading the

¹ Orson Welles on *The Dinah Shore Show*. 29 February 1979. Season 5. Episode 103.

² All statistics are according to YouTube’s own statistics page: <http://www.youtube.com/yt/press/statistics.html> Retrieved 15 July 2013 and 12 October 2014.

³ All comments made by Snyder and Covett throughout this document are from one interview with each: Cooke, D. (Interviewer) & Snyder, T. (Interviewee). (2016, 29 Nov.). *Audio interview*. Cooke, D. (Interviewer) & Covett, K. (Interviewee). (2016, 30 Nov.). *Audio interview*.

word about a web series and give content providers cues as to how their content is being received. How, then, can producers adapt their traditional conceptualization of audiences and what their “work” is to best help prospective media consumers locate an entertaining web series? How can they encourage and engage viewers in spreading the word that the show exists?

In the field of education, there is a similar challenge at play. Even the most seasoned instructors who have taught in the classroom for decades, often have difficulty understanding how teaching online changes the relationship between student and teacher. Their assumptions can put them at a disadvantage unless they remain open to learning about these differences. Institutions sometimes provide rubrics and other frameworks to help these instructors make their transition to distance education more effective. This situation also occurs in entertainment. Online affordances are not the same as in traditional broadcasting and producers with even decades of television broadcasting experience may not automatically understand these differences or how they impact the relationship to their audiences. This disconnect can adversely affect a web series’ visibility and ultimate success.

This dissertation is a bounded, intrinsic, single case study that documents one small content provider (producer) with considerable experience in broadcasting and cable animated television programming as he moves into the production and distribution of an animated comedy series on the Internet. It examines what the provider’s assumptions were about what such work entails based on his history in traditional “pushed” broadcasting. This study asks if the entertainment industry can borrow from online instructional design practices to increase the size and/or engagement of online entertainment audiences, or at least positively impact the framework from which providers can design their entertainment content. The answers could be

useful for other content providers, due to the vast amount of content cluttered on the Internet, and only so many hours in the day for potential viewers to discover it (Webster, 2014, p.4).

This dissertation will show that a design framework that borrows from the field of education might be useful for online content providers to see what their “work” actually is: to create content that is clear and user friendly, to articulate expectations (if applicable) of the audience, to offer a space for two-way conversations, allowing for regular and honest communication with their audience, and to utilize a continuum of user-generated activities as a means of assessing the content’s (or cultural artifact’s) appeal. Ultimately, these practices will assist in influencing engagement levels in order to help spread the viewing network. If online entertainment producers consider *audiences as students* and the expansion of viewership as a teaching objective, perhaps a teaching framework such as Addie Model or the Quality Matters (QM) rubric will give them a clearer sense of what is needed in designing online content to engage their audience members via varying creative activities.

I am therefore studying structural and design changes made to a specific comedy web series and its homepage, as well as the conversational creative activity between the original content producers and viewers over a timeline of 18 months. At two points during this time period, changes were made to the content and format of the web series and corresponding webpage based on eLearning practices. This project will analyze the activities of this entertainment “network” over these 18 months and examine if changes in the content provider’s assumptions regarding “the work” were useful.

BACKGROUND

It is apt to disclose my academic, professional and personal background as it explains my foregrounding of human agency and the work of the content provider as opposed to societal

structures. My undergraduate degree is in Studio Art (Drawing) and my Master's degree is in Communications Studies (Film). I have professionally worked in various media capacities including graphic art, animation, video and television production, scriptwriting, theater, radio and voiceover work. I believe my background in creative pursuits has led me to adopt a structural perspective on society (Webster, 2014, p. 11). True, society contains structures that may limit one's options, but there are many people in the world operating as freely and creatively as they can within these structures, and who can find ways to circumvent many of these limiting structures.

Although I have worked in entertainment, in most cases my employment in media was based primarily in the educational applications of media (higher education, corporate training, government regulatory training, instructional video and television). Most recently, my work in eLearning Development has given me the greatest versatility with compositional activities in my career. On any day, I could be writing or editing a training script, voicing and recording audio, generating graphic images (moving or stationary), all to best explain the content and serve the learner (Cooke, 2016, p. 2).

For years, I have worked full-time with subject matter experts (SMEs) in higher education, the federal government and the corporate world, assisting them in converting their knowledge into online employee development training. It is very rewarding work. These experts are intelligent and knowledgeable about their fields, but often are not knowledgeable about media technology or the peculiarities of teaching content online. I enjoy trying to “stay out of the way” of their content by showing these experts the most direct way to impact online learners. I really enjoy the collaboration.

My dissertation studies started when I was an instructional technologist for the Center for Teaching and Learning at a private university. At that time, my SMEs were primarily university professors who had decades of classroom teaching experience, but were now struggling as the university mandated that they adapt their coursework into online or blended digital formats. Some instructors embraced the change, some resisted, and some confided in me that they were actually afraid of the new technology. At this job, I was trained in the Quality Matters Review Process and with this tool I was able to immediately notice areas within course instructional design where improvements were needed. I was in this position for six and a half years, before moving to similar positions in the federal government and corporate world.

In the fall of 2011, as a mere fan, I began to watch *Explosion Bus*, a comedy series on the web that was posted weekly. I found the series smart and entertaining, as the producers were seasoned professionals, having had a good track record for creating award-winning shows on cable and standard broadcast television. However, as several weeks passed, I noticed that the producers seemed to have difficulty in generating interest in their show. Based on the visible numbers of views on YouTube and the numbers of participants in online synchronous chats, viewership simply was not expanding and it appeared their expertise with traditional broadcasting did not necessarily translate to the online environment. There were similarities to the situation I saw at work—where seasoned face-to-face instructors were not necessarily the most adept at shifting their face-to-face content to the online context. They were so used to the ways they taught without digital technologies that they had difficulty envisioning ways they could adapt their content with them. The tools that helped were the ADDIE model and the QM rubric, which gave instructors a list that helped them envision their overall content from a lot of angles, including the needs of their students.

Similarly, even with a successful history in traditional broadcasting, content providers might not automatically be aware of the differences between push and pull media (which will be defined in chapter two). Perhaps they could benefit from a shift in perspective of what their work is, based on their relationship to their audience. Perhaps they could learn to take advantage of online conversational affordances with a little theoretical and practical help. I began to wonder if I should contact the web series creators to see if they wanted any assistance. Thus began my journey to this dissertation, which is made possible entirely by the connectedness of social media and other new media technologies.

One of the primary developments of the Internet as it relates to entertainment was the creation of YouTube. This video-sharing website was created by three former PayPal employees (Hopkins 2006) on February 14, 2005. By November of the same year, the video-sharing site had already grown to 200,000 registered users watching two million videos per day (Graham 2005). As of April 2014, YouTube viewership was over one billion unique users per month, with a 50 percent increase in viewership per month (“almost an hour for every person on Earth”) and a 200 percent increase of registered users since 2012. By October 2014, the increase had slowed somewhat. YouTube’s *Statistics* page now claims “The number of people subscribing daily is up more than 3x since last year, and the number of daily subscriptions is up more than 4x since last year.” One statistic of particular importance is that “According to Nielsen, YouTube reaches more US adults ages 18-34 than any cable network.”²

With so many people shifting their media viewing habits to the Internet, it is no wonder that many content providers would likewise desire to make their content more directly available to viewers who are no longer (or at least not as often) in front of a traditional television screen.

² All statistics are according to YouTube’s own statistics page: <http://www.youtube.com/yt/press/statistics.html> Retrieved 15 July 2013 and 12 October 2014.

Internet content providers can enjoy not only the global potential for online viewership, but also take advantage of the looser, creative freedoms the Internet offers—such as the length and format of content, the nature of the programming content itself, and the ability to respond more quickly to viewer feedback. *Explosion Bus* is one production team's response to provide entertainment content without a broadcasting network's restrictions or benefits.

EXPLOSION BUS

Explosion Bus is an online animated comedy serial created by former teacher and television producer Tom Snyder, starring comedian/writer Jonathan Katz and comedy writer/performer/producer Tom Leopold. In the series, two teachers, Jon Gold and Leo Huckstep, become incensed when a former student of theirs, while appearing on “Monster Talent” (a nationally broadcast *American Idol* type of talent contest), is publicly humiliated by Wilson, a judge obviously based on *American Idol* judge Simon Cowell. His scathing criticism of her performance incites Jon and Leo to create their own talent show that would treat everyone with respect. Their motto is, “We’re nice.” The two find funding from a wealthy friend and purchase a bus to take around the country (having ultimately lost their teaching jobs) to scout out the best talent, which would be uploaded to their talent show website.

I discovered the show because I was a friend of Jonathan Katz on Facebook. My initial interest in the *Explosion Bus* show and webpage was as I said, merely as a fan. I had enjoyed the work of Tom Snyder and Jonathan Katz ever since their collaborations on Comedy Central's *Dr. Katz: Professional Therapist*, in the 1990's, and Cartoon Network's *Home Movies*, in the early 2000's. I was particularly intrigued that Snyder was now moving into the online space, the very arena I have been working in for over a decade, and studying at the doctoral level since 2007.

After creator/executive producer Tom Snyder had observed a continued merging of broadcast television and online video technologies, it was Snyder's desire to experiment with this conflation. The Internet not only promised relatively inexpensive direct access to viewers, but would allow him to have full control over the format, tone and content of these programs (Snyder, personal communication, November 3, 2011). The first of seven *Explosion Bus* episodes was posted on explosionbus.com and youtube.com on September 13, 2011, and it was Snyder's hope that the series would ultimately generate enough viewership to pay for continued production of the series for four years. However, being new to Internet "broadcasting," and possibly due to generational differences in familiarity with the social aspects of the Internet (Snyder is an over-60 baby boomer), Snyder was having difficulty in achieving this goal. Although the Internet gave him creative freedoms (in content, format, and scheduling), without the benefits of a traditional (push) broadcast network, a centralized broadcasting hub and large, marketing budgets, cultivating viewership proved to be a tricky endeavor. It was going to require a change in conceptualization as to the work of the online content provider.

SIGNIFICANCE

Spoiler alert: Snyder was ultimately not able to sustain production past this 18-month period. However, lessons can be learned from this "experiment." For one thing, in my studies, I have not discovered anyone else suggesting entertainment producers adopt an educational framework to inform their audience cultivation practices. I have also not discovered any other situation where a new media scholar or instructional technologist was given the unique position of influencing an entertainment series utilizing an educational tool and able to document the process. This documentation might be useful to industries seeking ways to learn from each other and cross-pollinate best practices.

Given that smaller content providers (producers who might be working alone or with a small team) typically have little to no budget for advertising, and are not generally well-versed in practices of sophisticated statistical analysis, the method and conceptual framework outlined in this dissertation should be achievable by one person and not require an expensive team of big data analysts, scientists, or statisticians. The results of this dissertation will hopefully demonstrate to scholars and smaller content providers alike that creating content or cultural artifacts from an educational conceptual framework can speed up and focus the process of designing entertainment content and positively impact engagement in an entertainment context.

It is my hope that the results of this research will show both scholars and content providers that entertainment can borrow from educational practices, and user-generated activities might provide a means of assessing (understanding, analyzing, and classifying) multiple streams of user-generated quantitative data. Ultimately, I hope an instructional conceptualization will help content providers provide a more direct connection with their audiences, which in turn will inspire audience members to respond with their own creative acts, which in turn will help spread their content and viewing network within the highly cluttered social space.

This project is situated within English studies because of the compositional and rhetorical aspects of this case study. However, because this project presents the notion of “audiences as students,” it also employs a cross-pollination of practices between education and entertainment studies. The concept of engagement is also significant to several more specialized fields including audience measurement, sentiment analysis, distance education and audience studies. More about these fields will be covered in the literature review.

RESEARCH DESIGN

This case study has been designed with a cyclical process of examining quantitative and qualitative data along a chronological timeline, comparing them across points of content change. The data is comprised of (a) the original activities of the *Explosion Bus* team (videos and website); (b) formatting changes to their content based on adapting standards from an educational rubric, and an educational model (ADDIE) made at two points during the main case study timeline of 18 months; (c) personal correspondence and interviews with Snyder and his producer, Katie Covett;³ and (d) series-related, user-generated activities within the *Explosion Bus* viewing network. These are the units of assessment that signal to the content provider whether their changes fostered engagement.

Chapter Four describes the before and after of *Explosion Bus* content and format, and documents the responsive activities of viewers across several phases of activity. A phase is not comprised of the content provider posting a video, and then another video. A phase follows a conversational cycle between the content provider and viewers: the content provider makes media content (video/webpage) available to the web community. Once members of the community have consumed the content, they respond to it based on their level of engagement. If viewers make measurable responses, *their responses* are available to the web community, which includes the content provider. This completes the cycle, or phase. Viewer responses are categorized by level of engagement, which then can be used to inform the content provider's decisions regarding their next content.

Chapter Five interprets the overall results from Chapter Four. In it, I examine the *Explosion Bus* network's overall activities across the phases and note significant findings. I

³All comments made by Snyder and Covett throughout this document are from one interview with each: Cooke, D. (Interviewer) & Snyder, T. (Interviewee). (2016, 29 Nov.). *Audio interview*.
Cooke, D. (Interviewer) & Covett, K. (Interviewee). (2016, 30 Nov.). *Audio interview*.

include the lessons learned by the *Explosion Bus* team regarding their audience conceptualization, work, and output. I utilize my data to answer my research questions, and realize, due to the synaptic, rhizomatic structure of the Internet, it is impossible to cordon off outside influences that also impact the viewing network. I discuss some of these outside influences, but maintain that a pedagogical framework can play a part in increasing engagement, as I revisit the data set at a couple points following the 18-month period *Explosion Bus* was active.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND STATEMENT

The four points of analysis mentioned in the Research Design will answer these questions:

1. Can utilizing an educational tool or framework help increase audience engagement to the point that more of them will view the content, participate in creative acts (become co-producers) and consequently help in the expansion of an entertainment audience?
2. Can entertainment content providers benefit from conceptualizing their viewing audience as students? If so, how can they benefit from this reconceptualization?
3. Can evaluating viewer activities and creative work provide an adequate means of assessing entertainment content (or a cultural artifact's) appeal? If so, why?

It is my assertion that struggling content providers will be able to better connect with their potential audiences if they conceptualize audience members as students, and assess their engagement based on the roles or work audience members are willing to voluntarily take on. Their creative responses surrounding cultural artifacts could in turn serve to spread exposure and even encourage members in their *own* social media networks to participate in creative activities

that would be circulated back to the larger viewing network and, especially, the creator of the original artifact. The artifact's audience could be expanded even further without any additional expense on the part of the content provider.

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

INTRODUCTION

My overall project has many layers to it and requires theoretical underpinnings from many fields. By default, applying a modified educational review process to an entertainment context calls for a theoretical orientation that relates to both entertainment and education. Conceptualizing a singular viewing network as a social microcosm requires some consideration of social science.

Content providers might find that this broad theoretical foundation leads them to a better optimization of Internet affordances. Experience with traditional (“push”) media may not be enough in understanding the greater opportunities for creative conversations on the Internet. Creating a cultural product that inspires engagement and encourages conversation may be what is needed to engage individual community members and motivate them to share content with others. The assumption is that the more engaged a viewer is, the more inclined she is to assume an active role within her network concerning her artifact of engagement: continued viewing of a web series, offering measurable feedback to the series, telling others about it, sharing links to the content, writing about it more extensively in a blog or an article, and even producing creative video content (e.g. a video review, video recap, spin-off series). This creative, measurable output could offer clues as to what in the content provided more engagement in this entertainment series.

Because technological affordances are available to online audience members, this project proposes a shift in audience conceptualization, expectations, and the nature of the work content providers should expect of themselves. Perhaps educational practices, which have been a part of

online activities longer than entertainment, will speed up the process of understanding the work of online entertainers. Merrill Morris and Christine Ogan saw the Internet as a means of mass communication before many streaming technologies were developed (1996):

Computer-mediated communication (CMC) at first resembled interpersonal communication and was relegated to the domain of other fields, such as education, management information science, and library science. These fields, in fact, have been doing research into CMC for nearly 20 years (Dennis & Gallupe, 1993; O'Shea & Self, 1983), and many of their ideas about CMC have proven useful in looking at the phenomenon as a mass medium. (Morris & Ogan, 1996, p. 40)

Content providers can take advantage of the groundwork paved in other fields such as education, psychology, and communication. In many ways, user-generated content has corresponding components within the educational industry. Producers who have conceptualized online users merely as a mass audience, possessing the potential of a close-knit community, might also find limitations from those paradigms due to the logistical differences with the Internet. For instance, “demographic groups whose members share common interests, needs and goals are not communities because they have not established a network of social relationships” (Andrews, et. al, 2001, p. 1). As such, “online community differs from face-to-face communities in important ways. A lack of the real world physical cues, the ability to change one's identity, social order and control, and purpose can be very different and raise particular challenges for online community builders.” (Andrews, et. al, 2001, p. 2)

This dissertation requires a Literature Review that borrows from a variety of fields: communication, marketing, audience measurement, sentiment analysis, sociology, psychology, and, of course, education. Since this project examines past and current approaches to audience

conceptualization, cultivation, and measurement, this review includes what the communication field offers concerning traditional expectations of content providers, audiences and their “work” (i.e. roles). Stemming from audience measurement is the entertainment industry’s dependence on audience demographics, opinion-mining algorithms, and audience-assessment practices, both traditional and online. This review also looks at methods of engagement practices in online education, adapting an educational rubric and instructional design model as a conceptual framework that is later applied to this case study.

As instructors request input from students regarding their goals for taking courses, content providers might benefit from considering why their content attracts viewers. Often, a consideration of psychological human motivations for becoming a participating member of a network or fan community in the first place is missing from audience measurement, sociology, communications, and education studies. *Why* individuals are attracted to certain media artifacts, and/or why they participate in fan community activities might be revealed in the roles they are willing or unwilling to assume within these networks. Therefore, part of my research borrows from psychology’s uses and gratifications theory (UGT), as well as communications research on audience involvement and connectedness—both to content and/or to the personas/characters featured in that content.

Although this project does not argue for the rationale of specific eLearning practices, I have included a section on engagement practices from the field of education, which are typically used to increase a sense of connectedness between the teacher (content provider), the subject matter (content), the student (audience member), and the community (of learning) around the subject. Distance education calls for a minimizing of transactional distance, which will be also covered in this review.

I have also included scholarship relating to the technological interconnectivity. This scholarship explains how individuals articulate digitally within and across multiple networks on the Internet, and, ultimately, is what make this case study possible. Network theories such as actor-network theory and activity theory are at play because of the rhizomatic interconnectedness of animate and inanimate objects within smaller networks on the larger World Wide Web. Articulation theory describes the ways in which networks are configured and connected, and can be applied to social media practices, online audience measurement techniques, and the roles of individual audience members within these connected spaces.

The theorist who has most impacted how I view roles within all aspects of society and, in particular this project, is Pierre Bourdieu. Bourdieu's socially-based framework in *The Field of Cultural Production* is the core model I draw from to examine and explain roles and activities of content providers and audience members and specifically the activities that individuals assume within any social sphere, be it entertainment or education. Entertainment content providers might benefit from a familiarity with each of these related disciplines.

The project requires a wide-ranging Literature Review because there are so many components. This diverse scholarship underpins the selection and assessment of qualitative and quantitative data with a cyclical conceptual framework—following activities from the content providers (*Explosion Bus* original content) to the audience activities, back to the provider's modification of the content utilizing an educational rubric, and back out to the audience, noting any impact on the responses and/or growth of the audience. The subsequent sections of this Literature Review are divided into five main sections: Definitions of Terms, Practices of Traditional Broadcasting Audiences, Practices of Online Audiences, Practices of Online

Education, and, lastly, Summarizing and Operationalizing Theoretical Foundations of this case study.

DEFINITIONS OF TERMS

Audience, Audiences and Viewers Defined

It is important to consider popular definitions of the audience, as they reveal the ways in which different industries and theorists place individuals and their activities into groups or expected behaviors. Writing in 1982, John Fiske differentiates the term “viewers,” “audience,” and “audiences” as distinct entities: “A ‘viewer’ is someone who is watching television, making meanings and pleasures from it, in a social situation” (Fiske, 1982, p. 17), and “‘Viewing’ then, is an active process that brings to television the social relations of the viewer (his/her point of view) and the material situation” (p. 17). He goes on to say that “‘Audience,’ in the singular, implies that television reaches a homogeneous mass of people who are all essentially identical, who receive the same messages, meanings, and ideologies from the same programs and who are essentially passive” (p. 16). He says that audiences, in the plural, “recognizes that there are differences between viewers of any one program ... the term ‘audiences’ recognizes the heterogeneity of society” (p. 17) and that “our social system is crisscrossed by axes of class, gender, race, age, nationality, region, politics, religion, and so on.” (p. 17).

Jason Mittell distinguishes between the terms “viewers” and “audiences.” To the television industry, and specifically the field of audience measurement, viewers and audiences are different groups:

Television viewers [emphasis Mittell] are the actual people who watch television—you, your friends and family, and the millions of other real people watching

television. **Television audiences** [emphasis Mittell] are the way the industry thinks about viewers: categorizes them, measures them, designs programming for them, and sells them to advertisers. But there is a crucial gap between the behaviors of real viewers and the industry's understanding of how the television industry functions. (Mittell, 2010, p. 73)

Not only are there distinctions made about the word “audience,” but academia and audience studies are still redefining what the broader sense of audience is. Karen Ross and Virginia Nightingale call attention to the boundary between “audiences as consumers” and “audiences as show content,” as first drawn by *The Oprah Winfrey Show* (Ross and Nightingale, 2003, p. 146). Instead of featuring predominant celebrities on her show, Winfrey “spawned an entirely new genre which has become loosely known as ‘confessional TV,’ where ‘ordinary people’” are the featured guests and talk about personal “high concept” aspects of their lives (Ross & Nightingale, 2003, p. 147).¹ “The audience subject and the audience object suddenly became interchangeable: each was also the other” (Ross & Nightingale, 2003, p. 147).

This concept later metamorphosed into reality television shows “where viewers become voyeurs looking at and listening to a microcosmic world where a faux intimacy is traded in exchange for a fleeting leap at fame” (Ross & Nightingale, 2003, p. 147). Moving the viewer into the show is also a tactic that online content providers use to engage audiences. *Explosion Bus* employed this approach from the start, finding their talent show contestants via Craigslist.com (a free, online classifieds service). To encourage participation and spread the

¹ Granted, it could be argued that audience participation was already greatly utilized in other types of shows. Game shows, panel shows, amateur contests and audience participation shows had already crossed a line of audience member as show topic very early in the days of national broadcasting. *Major Bowes' Original Amateur Hour* was a nationally-broadcast radio show offering non-celebrity talent and first broadcast in 1934 (Ramsburg, 2012, p. 20). Art Linkletter hosted an audience participation show called *People are Funny* starting in 1942 (Ramsburg, 2012, p. 116). Linkletter also hosted a show called *House Party*, which featured a segment entitled “Kids Say the Darnedest Things” (Ramsburg, 2012, p. 117).

word about the show, *Explosion Bus* later solicited “audition tapes” from audience members, and rewarded viewers with being literally drawn into the background of *Explosion Bus* scenes and taking suggestions regarding scene settings.

I use terms in the same way the industry does: “viewers,” “users,” or “audience members” refer to individuals who watch or have watched content. The term “audience” or “audiences” will refer to broader groups of demographically categorized people who watch or have watched content.

Push vs. Pull Media Defined

Content providers need to be aware of the primary logistical differences between traditional media delivery and discovery and those of the Internet, summed up as “push” and “pull” media. There are distinct differences in the work of audience members between the two types. As with traditional mass media such as newspapers and radio, broadcast television (network and cable) is a “push medium.” Communications are sent at the discretion of the sender and not dependent on the receiver’s initiation. In fact, the receiver may not necessarily even come in contact with the communications. “Push/pull media” crosses multiple fields. In education, “push” can refer to a teacher’s or teaching institution’s sending out of correspondences (mail, email, syllabus requirements) directly to students (Thornton/Houser, 2001, para. 1). Again, the student does not initiate this correspondence. The student is merely a receiver of the information sent to her.

In marketing, “push” and “pull” refer not only to the sending out of content, but also the ways in which marketing schemes are employed. “A ‘push’ promotional strategy makes use of a company's sales force and trade promotion activities to create consumer demand for a product ...

The producer promotes the product to wholesalers, the wholesalers promote it to retailers, and the retailers promote it to consumers.” (Riley, 2012, para. 2)

Conversely, “A ‘pull’ selling strategy is one that requires high spending on advertising and consumer promotion to build up consumer demand for a product” (Riley, 2012, para. 6).

The *Free On-line Dictionary of Computing* defines “push” and “pull” media the following ways:

A model of media distribution where items of content are sent to the user (viewer, listener, etc.) in a sequence, and at a rate determined by a server to which the user has connected. This contrasts with pull media where the user requests each item individually. Push media usually entail some notion of a “channel” which the user selects and which delivers a particular kind of content (push media, n.d.).

Alternatively,

Broadcast television is (for the most part) the prototypical example of push media: you turn on the TV set, select a channel and shows and commercials stream out until you turn the set off. By contrast, the World Wide Web is (mostly) the prototypical example of pull media: each "page", each bit of content, comes to the user only if he requests it; put down the keyboard and the mouse, and everything stops (“push media,” n.d.).

Engagement, Connectedness and Involvement Defined

As with the term “audience,” “engagement” is a term used in multiple ways. In the field of education, “engagement” refers to the level students interact with content, make meaning with it, and use self-regulated means to solve problems (Bangert, 2002, p. 24). It is a debated concept. Sometimes engagement is conceptualized as inner motivation. Sometimes it is conceptualized as external action. With regard to children’s education, for instance, engagement is often tied to behaviors such as attendance, performance, teacher and inter-student relationships, and, most

importantly, satisfactory completion of basic education requirements (Reschley & Christenson, 2012, p. 4). The opposite of engagement is “disaffection or burnout” (Skinner & Pitzer, 2012, p. 24). To other education scholars, “Engagement is often a literate act, an encounter with an organized body of knowledge that must be decoded, interpreted, and integrated in meaning-making processes” (Bangert, 2002, p 24). Bangert’s article (2002), and the *Handbook of Research on Student Engagement*, (Reschley, et al., 2012) list many models of engagement, each identifying differing continua of cognitive activities and processes that can be tied to levels of student engagement. Shu Ching Yang identified a potential of 32 cognitive activities in which students engage when encountering taught information. In psychology, “connectedness” refers to “a multidimensional construct that captures the extent to which a television program influences the personal and social aspects of the viewer’s life” (Russell, et al, 2004, p. 277). Connectedness can be associated between the viewer and a television production, a viewer and another viewer, or even the viewer and a character on a television program. In communications studies, “involvement” is the preferred term. William Brown says, “Involvement, broadly defined, is the degree of psychological response of a person to a mediated message or persona. Involvement is not static or fixed, but rather a dynamic process in which a motivational state of arousal forms and fluctuates both during and after media consumption.” (Brown, 2011, p. 4)

In the *Journal of Advertising*, Judith Zaichkowsky compiles an extensive list of foundational studies done between 1967 and 1982 outlining cognitive and emotional types of involvement in advertising, purchasing decisions, products, and communication contexts that demonstrate the varying nature of involvement (Zaichkowsky, 1985, pp. 10-11). This fluctuating idea of involvement is germane to this project since it measures how changes to content over time affect viewership. My research draws from all three of these fields.

As Kinner and Pitzer have found in their “motivational models of engagement studies,” motivation is an internal dynamic, but “engagement refers to energized, directed and sustained action, or the observable qualities of students’ actual interactions with academic tasks” (Skinner & Pitzer, 2012, p. 24). This perspective underpins my approach to assessing engagement in *Explosion Bus* viewers by examining their creative activities.

I define engagement as the level to which a self-regulated or self-motivated viewer feels drawn to a particular cultural product, freely and voluntarily interacts with the content, and responds to it with a measurable, creative or behavioral act. A viewer’s creative response demonstrates a role the viewer has assumed for herself within the larger viewing network, and points toward the viewer’s level of engagement. Online viewer engagement needs to be higher than in traditional pushed television since content is not as easily found or regularly scheduled. In addition, viewers have greater opportunities to express their engagement online through various forms of creative acts. Therefore, just as in the field of education, an entertainment content provider can consider viewer creative acts as a means of assessment, with the assumption that the higher the level of viewer engagement, the greater the creative role or “work” a viewer will choose to take on within the network of viewers.

Creative Acts Defined

The phrase creative acts refers to a spectrum of measurable, compositional activities in which a user documents her response to an artifact. As I define it, when a user employs a digital tool to express a feeling or a response to an artifact, she is engaging in a compositional, creative act that contributes to the wider network and the vetting or decrying of material within that network. The act can be as simple as clicking “LIKE” or “UNLIKE” on YouTube. It can be a

comment of few or of many words, subscribing to a YouTube channel, user-generated video, or producing an entirely new video series.

Role, Work and Labor Defined

Even somewhat basic terms such as role and work have nuances that should be mentioned in this Literature Review. The Oxford English Dictionary defines role as “A person’s allotted share, part, or duty in life and society; the character, place, or status assigned to or assumed by a person” (Def. 1) as well as “[t]he function performed by someone or something in a particular situation or process” (Def. 3). In the context of social sciences, role is defined as “The characteristic or socially expected behaviour pattern of any person with a certain identity or status in a particular social setting or environment” (“Role,” 2010). The term role as I use it describes a function that a person *voluntarily* chooses to assume within a broader network of individuals, rather than a function or duty that is assigned to them or that is compulsory.

The term work has many contexts of meaning and can refer to more benign, general activities such as “something that is or was done; what a person does or did; an act, deed, proceeding, business” (Def. 1.a.) (“Work,” 2010) to a more creative activity such as “a literary or musical composition” (Def. 16.a) or “product of any of the fine arts (in relation to the artist) ... and connoting high artistic quality,” (Def. 16.b) to more exerted activities such as “an action involving effort or exertion directed to a definite end, esp. as a means of gaining one’s livelihood; labour, toil; (one’s) regular occupation or employment” (Def. 4.a) and any “action or activity involving physical or mental effort” (4.a.) (“Work,” 2014). I will be using the term work primarily to refer to creative, compositional and literate activities that audience members *choose* to participate in. Since some of the scholarship on work also uses the term labor, I would like to make the distinction between how these terms are often used.

The term “labor” is often used with an effort-based view of actions² and can be defined as “an instance of physical or mental exertion; a piece of work that has been or is to be performed; a task (Def. 1), a “bodily or mental exertion particularly when difficult, painful, or compulsory; (hard) work; toil” (Def. 2.a) (“Labor,” 2010). The term labor can also carry with it a value in society and can be defined as “a resource or commodity, typically when necessary to supply the needs of the community or for the execution of a particular task; the contribution of the worker to production” (Def. 10.a.) and the “effort made or trouble taken in accomplishing or attempting to accomplish a task” (Def. 5.a) (“Labor,” 2010).

Marxist “labour theory of value states that the value of a commodity is influenced or determined by the amount of labour expended in its production” and also considers Labour Time: the “time devoted to labour; such time considered as a commodity or as a measure of value, effort, etc” (“Labor,” 2010). I mention “Labor Theory of Value and Labor Time” as these are often mentioned in discussions regarding the work of the audience (Bermejo, 2007; Fiske 1989; McGuigan and Manzerolle, 2014). Although audience members are engaging in exertive activities that may contribute to a broader community or network, these audience members are doing so on a voluntary, participatory basis. Their roles are tied to a level of engagement rather than a mandate. I distinguish the term “labor” as implying “effort-based” exertion with an expectation of some sort of compensation, and “work” as simply the amount of effort needed to craft or achieve a task or production, freely engaged in whether it is mandated, commissioned, compensated, or not.

TRADITIONAL BROADCASTING AUDIENCES: ASSESSMENT & MEASUREMENT

The place where television and advertising meet is audience measurement (Blumenthal & Goodenough, 2006, p. 68).

² <http://www.oed.com.proxy.lib.odu.edu/view/Entry/104732?rskey=VUi2dw&result=1&isAdvanced=false#eid>

The scores that determined the players' success or failure back then—and ever since then in all of radio, television and cable—are ratings. Ratings is a term coined by pioneer researcher Archibald Crossley in 1930 for the results of his radio audience surveys of sometimes questionable accuracy. Nevertheless, ratings have always determined the winners and losers in broadcasting's ongoing battle for audience popularity and advertising revenue. (Ramsburg, 2012, p. 3)

To better understand current measurement practices of online audiences, it is important to understand what the practices have been in earlier forms of pushed mass media, when two-way conversations were not as immediate or as direct between the content provider and the media consumer. Scholarship on the history of marketing and cultivating audiences in traditional, broadcast television begins with twentieth century radio polling and commodification practices. Much in the same way that technological innovations “remediate” earlier technologies (Bolter and Grusin, 2000), the broadcast model for television emerged from radio, which emerged from the format of medicine shows (Ramsburg, 2012, p. 5). In *Network Radio Ratings, 1932-1953: A History of Prime Time Programs Through the Ratings of Nielsen, Crossley and Hooper*, Jim Ramsburg goes all the way back to the invention of radio technologies (receivers, microphones, transmitters, telephone lines, etc.) and follows their developments through what eventually became what he regards as the Golden Era of Network Radio, ending in the early 1950's. Through this differentiation of radio technologies and the corporations that patented them, Ramsburg explains how this “free entertainment” was quickly commodified. Unfortunately, on closer examination, viewer ratings, generally regarded as “the currency” of mass communications industries, are not exactly a precise science. Jason Mittell rightly points out the elusive nature of audience measurement:

Because there are typically no direct sales of television programming to measure, such as the box office in film or retail sales of publishing and music, ratings are the system by which audiences are converted into a quantifiable currency that facilitates the exchange between advertisers and programmers. (Mittell, 2010, p.77)

There will be more discussion on this concept of currency (pg. 39), but, basically, “ratings measure the percentage of television households tuned into a program at a given moment” (Mittell, 2010, p. 78) out of the total number of households “or of all people within a demographic group” (Beville, 1988, p. 310) that could possibly be tuning in. A seminal work on the industry is Hugh Malcolm Beville, Jr.’s *Audience Ratings: Radio, Television, Cable* (1988), which explains the basics of the audience ratings industry: A rating equals the number of households, viewers or listeners divided by the sample universe total (Beville, 1988, p. 310). Of course, the system is more complicated than that and considers data through various lenses. There are multiple ways to measure viewership: (1) total Households Using Television, or HUT’s (p. 310) (as opposed to households that are not using television but still have a television in the house), (2) People Using Television (PUT’s) (individuals who have television and are watching them at certain times of the day or night versus individuals who are not using their televisions), as well as (3) People using Radio (PUR’s) instead of television. The percentage of the total number of HUT’s that are watching a particular program at a specific appointed time is called a share (pp. 310-311). Beville says, “Share is a relatively stable figure” (p. 312). However, “it does not measure inherent program strength because each program operates in a different competitive climate” (p. 312).

Since every potential household that owns a television set may not always have it turned on, it is important to show a distinction between HUT’s and PUT’s. Considering that certain

times of the day have fluctuating television use, such as lower viewing patterns during normal business hours, when many people are at work and not able to watch, or after midnight while most people are asleep, the concept of a share seems a fairer way to measure the interest level of viewers as opposed to comparing them to higher viewing times such as 8:00 or 9:00 P.M. when most people are home, awake and not working.

Audiences in the ratings industry are broken into demographical categories and by the amount of time a program is watched over a period of “five (or six) minutes or more during its duration (Beville, 1988, p. 312).” With the growing number of individual networks broadcasting content, especially in the cable television industry, it becomes increasingly difficult to gain as high an audience share as had been possible in the early years of television, when there were only three major national broadcasting networks. Ratings results have adjusted to this to include cumes, the cumulative audience of unique viewers—the total number of different individuals who watch (Mittell, 2010, p. 79). Why this is important is due to the superlative claims that this distinction allows broadcasters to make. According to Mittell (writing in 2010), both Fox News and Cable News Network (CNN) could boast having the highest number of viewers. However, CNN had more unique total viewers whereas Fox News “typically averages higher ratings per program than CNN” (Mittell, 2010, p. 79). Of course, online audiences are typically different demographically (generally younger) from traditional broadcasting audiences, although these differences are shifting with time.

Now that the audience ratings system in general has been established, this section looks at how this system developed historically when radio was the only mass-broadcast medium. This scholarship expands the foundation of how viewership and engagement are measured online.

History of Conceptualizing, Assessing and Measuring Audiences

Hugh Malcom Beville, Jr. cites the start of mass media audience measurement in the spring of 1928 (Beville, 2010, p. 3) with surveys conducted on behalf of the National Broadcasting Company (NBC) to find out how many people owned and listened to the radio. An assumption of these surveys was that participants would be accurate, truthful and providing sufficient information for networks and advertisers. However, surveys were not measuring actual listening patterns, or a specific program's popularity (Beville, 1988, p. 3). Until audience measurement as an industry was born, a primary indicator of popularity came through the mail in the form of fan letters (Beville, p. 3).

Archibald M. Crossley was one of the founding members of what became the Cooperative Analysis of Broadcasting (CAB) which began conducting a year-long series of telephone listener surveys starting in the spring of 1930 (Beville, p. 4). In the next several years, these surveys became more consistent, and were used by a broader number of clients. Says Beville, "Initially only advertisers were accepted as clients ... However, a year later [1931], agency subscriptions were accepted" (p. 6). "Networks were not accepted as subscribers at that time" (Beville, p. 6). As more companies came to rely on the data of the CAB (as well as the Association of National Advertisers, or ANA), practices began to become more standardized.

Ramsburg's book describes Crossley's Next Day Recall method (Ramsberg, 2012, p. 16) which polled radio listeners the day after radio shows aired. Says Ramsburg, "The recall system was rife with the possibility of memory error and weighted in favor of the most popular and best publicized programs which came immediately to mind—whether heard or not." (p. 16).

In 1934, audience research became a little more direct with the Clark-Hooper Broadcast Advertising Report (Ramsburg, 2012, p. 16). The Clark-Hooper pollsters telephoned random listeners every evening in 30 cities asking the same four questions:

1. Were you listening to the radio just now?
2. [If so] To what program were you listening, please?
3. Over what station is the program coming?
4. What advertiser puts on the program? (Ramsburg, 2012, p.16)

Unfortunately, there was no scientific way to verify if the data they were being given was accurate.

Since the early days of radio, programming had been designed to reflect the daily schedules of audiences—offering family programming in the evenings when children and husbands were home with their wives, offering programming for women who, until the 1970's, were typically at home in the daytime (Blumenthal and Oliver Goodenough, 2006, p. 104).

Somewhere in the mid 1950's, the notion of viewership success shifted from having a high number of people watching or listening to a program to having “the right” people watching or listening. Fred Silverman, former President of American Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) entertainment says,

[W]e were the first network, you know, to actively go after the 18-49 audience group.

And that's not something that ABC started in the mid 70's. Now going back as far as the late 50's, that was their target audience. Then they called them “the get age group,” the 18-49's, but they were big family, you know, a younger, big-buying power. (Pasternack, 2001, part 8)

The reason for targeting younger viewers was “that advertisers want to target the youngest viewers possible so that they'll develop brand loyalty that will last years” (Molley, 2013, para. 10).

Instead of calculating success with the total number of national viewers, broadcast networks and ad agencies determined that audience numbers from rural parts of the country (with lower incomes) were not as desirable as audience numbers from urban areas. The reason for targeting urban viewers was simply numerical:

By 1900, almost 14 percent were urbanites, although only 12 cities had one million or more inhabitants. In 1950, 30 percent of the world’s population resided in urban centers. The number of cities with over one million people had grown to 83. (“Human Population,” n.d. para. 1)

At the end of the 1970-1971 viewing season, several of the most popular shows on television were cancelled due to the fact that mainly older, rural audiences were watching. Fred Silverman was program head at CBS at the time of this “Rural Purge,” when Pat Buttrum of *Green Acres* fame claimed that “It was the year CBS killed everything with a tree in it” (Harkins, 2004, p. 203). Silverman states the rationale of this purge in a 2001 interview:

The fact is that we had an old schedule that was really directed toward very old people in rural areas and our company-owned stations in cities like New York, Chicago, Los Angeles, were dying with this schedule...Something had to be done, and I think there was total agreement. Bob Wood was president of the network, his boss Jack Schneider and [William] Paley said “Let’s bite the bullet, and let’s turn this schedule over and do it as quickly as you possibly can.” (Pasternack, 2001, part 3)

By the end of the 1971 season, “rural” shows such as *Hee-Haw* (which initially aired on CBS), *Green Acres*, and *The Beverly Hillbillies* (Harkins, 2004, p. 203) as well as shows that skewed for older audiences, such as *The Red Skelton Show* (Folsom, 2013, para. 2) and *The Lawrence Welk Show* (originally on American Broadcasting Company, or ABC) were gone from the three major networks (“Useful Notes/The Rural Purge,” n.d.).

By the 1980’s, cable television began to splinter demographic audiences into separate networks—Nickelodeon for children, Black Entertainment Television (BET) for African-Americans, Lifetime for women—and demographic targeting of programming began to be more stratified: children ages 2-5, boys/girls 6-11, pre-teen boys/girls, boys/girls 12-17, men/women 18-24, men/women 25-34, men/women 35-49, men/women 50-64, men/women 65+, young parents, Spanish-speakers, and upscale vs. lower income (Blumenthal & Goodenough, 2012, pp.104-111). The practice of networks’ targeting all of their programming toward a specific demographic (e.g., Nickelodeon for children) is called narrowcasting (Mittell, 2010, p.11). As Henry Jenkins explains in *Spreadable Media*,

[T]he ratings industry constructs a statistical representation of who might be watching and how they *might* be watching [emphasis mine]. This model uses demographics to segment the television audience into easily definable groups, differentiated by factors such as age, income, gender, and ethnicity. (p. 118)

Before the proliferation of digital media software, viewers did not have many opportunities to participate in creating their own content; certainly few could create content at a professional quality or have a means of widely distributing it, nor could they, were they given any control over network schedules. So, ratings were deemed a necessary and primary means of audience assessment. Jenkins notes that, “Television networks and advertisers purchase the

ratings from a single accredited supplier (Nielsen) with a longstanding interest in pleasing both” (Jenkins, 2013, p. 119).

Traditional Broadcast Audiences: Shift from Qualitative to Quantitative Data

As stated before, audience measurement practices started with qualitative data collected post-broadcast via telephone surveys and polls. As time progressed, there was a shift from qualitative to quantitative data due in large part to the broadcasting industry’s interest in monetizing its airspace, products, and services more efficiently. As new companies and industries get more established, it is common to find methods of streamlining processes. Measuring the numbers of eyes exposed to content was deemed a viable measurement for a program’s success—viable, though, as we’ve seen, not exactly accurate.

Monetizing viewership is also a common goal of online content providers, so comparing online practices with former audience measurement and categorization processes is pertinent to this project. *This Business of Television*, by Howard Blumenthal and Oliver Goodenough, declares “As television in the United States has evolved, its principle purpose has become the distribution of commercials” (2006, p. 104). Surprisingly, there are not many scholarly works that document the historical decisions that ultimately led to audience measurement practices of push media providers. As Mittell mentioned the currency nature of the ratings system (2010, p. 27), Jenkins agrees that the ratings industry collects data that merely serves as an acceptable common currency between producers and advertisers. This currency is constructed from “a statistical representation of who might be watching and how they might be watching. This model uses demographics to segment the television audience into easily definable groups, differentiated by factors such as age, income, gender, and ethnicity” (Jenkins, 2013, p. 118).

Jason Mittell covers a vast amount of historical and current practices of the television industry in *Television and American Culture*, which tie also to technological developments in broadcasting, and result in shifts of control, power, discovery, and viewing from content providers to the audience. Mittell divides media practices into three eras:

1. The Golden Network Era, when ABC, CBS and NBC ruled the airwaves.
2. The Multi-Channel Era, when cable networks encroached upon and divided the network audiences.
3. The Convergence Era, which springs out of new, viewer-controlled technologies as well as the interconnectivity of the Internet (Mittell, 2010, p. 11). This era is still developing.

The availability of more viewing options has given audiences more choices, but it also gives the original three major networks a much smaller number of potential viewers. In 2001, Fred Silverman says ABC was “a strong number one” in 1978:

They had, I believe, a twenty-one rating in prime time. If you look at what the networks are doing now, they’re getting eight and change. So, you know, our rating was almost three times the homes rating of what a network would be doing now. (Pasternack, 2001)

Criticism of Traditional Audience Conceptualization, Measurement and

Manufacture: El Mystico Logic, Illusio and the Smythe Debate

The splintering of audiences and the problem of correlating demographics to audience behavior (i.e., car commercials that target 25-year-olds don’t necessarily mean this group has the money to purchase the car) are only a couple issues related to traditional audience conceptualization, measurement, and commodification practices. In older audience measurement systems, the psychological reasons viewers were attracted to media at all were not typically part

of the measurement process. Nielsen typically tracks which television program was viewed, how many people viewed it, and which demographic typically makes up these viewers. If demographics do not necessarily predict audience engagement then something else might be a better indicator.

In traditional broadcasting as well as on the Internet, numbers of eyes do not necessarily indicate any measurable level of attention or engagement to content; 10 different people could sit in front of a television screen, but five of them could be distracted by other activities, two may hate the content but not be in a position to switch it off. Maybe only one viewer will have been actively enjoying the program enough to watch it again. Another complication with numeric totals is that the total number of people watching a particular program regularly is not what advertisers want as an end in itself. The goal for advertisers is to impact viewer behavior to the extent that they will purchase the products being sold during the commercial breaks of the content. In traditional broadcasting, the more people that watch a television program, the more they can charge advertisers for ad time.

Online, the level of engagement is more important to content providers than in traditional broadcasting because advertisements may be in the form of banner ads, which pay per view. More engagement may lead to more views; more views mean more money (even if it is a small amount) to content providers. However, neither of these business models ties exposure of ads to the purchase of the advertised products themselves. Therefore, other markers for more engagement might be more useful for online content providers.

How audiences are measured is only one component of audience measurement. Which units of measurement to employ, and the most efficient method of gathering these units are also

issues this industry deals with. As a result, there is some criticism of many traditional audience conceptualization and measurement practices, which are further complicated in the digital era.

I have to disclose a perception that comes to mind as I research audience measurement systems: systems of cultural currency are so based on mutual agreement between advertisers and broadcasting networks, rather than actual numbers regarding audience purchasing behavior, that I cannot help but think of an old Monty Python sketch that lampooned a similar type of mutual agreement concerning the production of cheap housing projects in Britain in the late 1960's/early 1970s. In the Python sketch, government housing officials wanted housing to be constructed so cheaply that they hired a hypnotist and his assistant, "El Mystico and Janet" to "create" apartment complexes in people's minds by hypnosis. They could construct an entire block of flats by hypnosis for £5, and as long as people believed in the buildings, they would stay up. However, as soon as doubt entered the minds of any of the residents, the buildings would begin to collapse. This perspective may seem a bit unorthodox, but this is my impression of the audience measurement systems industry.

Pierre Bourdieu referred to this phenomenon as *illusio*. Bourdieu's *The Field of Cultural Production* ends with this acknowledgement:

Cultural production requires that all of society (or at least those attracted to those fields) to believe that this "game" is worth playing (p. 81) and that the cultural and symbolic capital has some degree of agreed-upon value. It is hard to really measure scientifically what that value is, so participants have to take it for granted that the game exists, everyone's playing it, and it provides some sort of social function. (Cooke, 2016a, p. 8)

Within the broadcasting industry, it has been traditionally accepted that younger viewers are more desirable than older viewers. However, longtime advertising executive, Bob Hoffman,

author of *101 Contrarian Ideas About Advertising*³ aptly points out that this deeply entrenched belief remains strong in the marketing industry in spite of the fact that older people statistically are responsible “for about half of all consumer spending ... control over 70 percent of all the wealth in the country ... buy almost two-thirds of all new cars ... own 57 percent of all second and vacation homes and all the stuff that goes with that” and “are far easier and cheaper to reach than other groups” (Hoffman, 2013, para. 16).

The industry believes the way to find more desirable viewers is through stratifying the entire audience into demographic categories and by determining how those within each category will behave, as if they, as a group, will respond the same way. Nielsen provides data to producers and advertisers and convinces them that targeting certain demographics will yield the highest benefit. Hoffman asserts the actual issue with advertisers is that they are typically young themselves and do not relate to older generations (Hoffman, 2013, para. 27). Also, there is a fear that younger audience members may perceive brands their parents used as being brands for older people and not for the younger, hipper generation.

There is even evidence of how this belief can backfire: when Oldsmobile changed its slogan to “This is not your father’s Oldsmobile,” it backfired in three ways:

1. Younger people could not afford new cars.
2. Younger people were not interested in buying Oldsmobile in general.
3. (a very significant issue) The new slogan actually was a back-handed insult to the main customer base of the brand.

Says Hoffman, “Apparently, Oldsmobile thought it was a good idea to malign their real customers and flatter the people who would never buy their products” (Hoffman, 2016, para.3).

Yet the focus on demographics still persists.

³ *101 Contrarian Ideas About Advertising* is currently one of Amazon's best-selling books on advertising.

Additionally, viewers that “show up” to watch scheduled, traditional programs, following the appointment-based broadcasting model, are regarded more highly than online viewers mainly because advertisers do not pay as much, if at all, for online advertising (Jenkins, 2013, p. 120). Many viewers also fall into the category of a “surplus audience”—“audience members outside the target demographic are often treated as ‘surplus’” (Jenkins, 2013, p. 129). These viewers are not regarded as highly either, as the ratings industry focuses on hitting target demographics and setting prices according to the desirability of each demographic category—as if a particular demographic’s mere exposure to an advertisement will yield the advertiser’s desired financial outcomes from only those who fall in that targeted demographic. That is *El Mystico* logic in action; as long as everyone agrees that the money of certain demographics is worth more than the money of members of other demographics, the *illusio* remains. Henry Jenkins agrees that it is not an exact science, but this mutual agreement does serve a purpose; it provides a conceptual framework from which all parties choose to agree. As Jenkins says, “The ratings system is configured to provide a consistent currency for business deals to be conducted, not primarily to provide an accurate account of all who watch” (Jenkins, 2013, p. 119). Online, ratings by necessity are measured quite differently.

Indeed, audience measurement remains a somewhat vague industry because at its most accurate, measuring instruments only take into account *who* claims they were in the vicinity while a particular show or network was broadcast on a media device (radio, television, etc.). Audience measurement practices do not include *why* they watch, *how* they watch (Mittell, 2010, p. 74) or if they were even engaged at all with the content. Content providers should give consideration to the *why*’s and *how*’s of media consumers, as they can impact the ways in which content is to be designed and distributed.

Audience Work and Commodification

Another critical aspect of ratings, audience measurement and overall conceptualization of the audience, in traditional broadcasting is in the debate over *what* is being manufactured—is it the broadcast material or is it the audience themselves? If a content provider relies on her audience to sustain programming, then what is the work of the provider to cultivate that work from the audience? This is particularly significant when considering the roles that audience members are willing to take on within a viewing network. To round out the conceptualization of audiences, Dallas Smythe's seminal work *The Blind Spot Debate* brings up a useful point, which criticizes scholars for focusing on the cultural construction of media and all but ignoring the material and financial ramifications of "audience manufacture." For Smythe, the commodity is not the media productions that audiences enjoy; it is the audience itself that is the commodity sold to advertisers. "[T]he information, entertainment and 'educational' material transmitted to the audience is an inducement (gift, bribe or 'free lunch') to recruit potential members of the audience and to maintain their loyal attention" (Smythe, 1977, p. 5). These points are useful to consider, especially if content providers are looking at their work through the lens of their own *habitus*.⁴

In *Communications: Blindspot of Western Marxism*,⁵ Smythe states his perspective that viewing television is not a "passive" activity:

The material reality under monopoly capitalism is that all non-sleeping time of most of the population is work time. This work time is devoted to the production of commodities-in-general (both where people get paid for their work and as members of audiences) and in the production and reproductions of labor power (the pay for which is subsumed in

⁴ More on *habitus* on p. 91.

⁵ First published in the *Canadian Journal of Political and Social Theory*, Vol. 1, No. 3, 1977.

their income). Of the off-the-job work time, the largest single block is time of the audiences which is sold to advertisers. (Smythe, republished in 2014, p. 31)

Douglas Rushkoff echoes this perspective in *Program or Be Programmed*, which points out that the customers of Facebook are not Facebook users, but rather the advertisers who buy the attention of Facebook users for their advertisements. To many Marxists, if you are not paying for something online, then you are the commodity being sold.

Whereas the Marxist perspective is useful, these arguments can often reduce humans to having no agency whatsoever, nor possessing power of any kind. That is not my perspective. Whenever enough individuals choose not to watch a television show, the show will not continue. Whenever a user becomes a member of Facebook, yes, she will be exposed to advertisements (many of them customized as best as can be surmised to her perceived interests based on her searches and comments). However, repeated exposure to targeted advertisements does not guarantee that any viewer will exhibit any change in purchasing behavior. Some viewers may respond to these ads, but many do not and in their minds, they are not doing “work” by choosing to watch an online video that happens to display an advertisement. Likewise, viewers who chose to like, comment or create some type of media response to an online video may be doing it in response to internal motivation (see *Uses and Gratifications*, p. 60) that are entirely outside the influence of these ads.

Some theorists, such as John Fiske, assert that even the passive viewing of televisual products can be considered “work” and therefore audiences are subject to exploitation. On the other hand, the same people that warn of this exploitation also warn that these products should be accessible and available for all (Jenkins, 2006; Smythe, 1977, 1981; Selfe, 1999). Why would that be of concern if consumers are being oppressed or exploited? Smythe defines “work” in

multiple ways, first as “something you would prefer not to do, something unpleasant, alienating, and frustrating” (Smythe, 1981, p. 256) and yet, “at its base, work is something creative, something distinctly human” (Jenkins, 2013, p. 126).

I do not hold that the act of viewing television for enjoyment is in and of itself “work,” any more than the act of reading a book for enjoyment is. The only differences between the two activities are that a reader might have acquired a book for free through the library and was not subject to any commercial advertisements within the pages of their reading. Watching television requires more effort and expense on the part of the viewer—paying to purchase a television, paying an electric bill, paying for cable service and having viewing decisions subject to advertisements and measurement systems. Of course, savvy business people can glean financial rewards and other benefits from viewers who may not be aware that their acts of omission or commission can be measured, directed and monetized. It would appear that at the heart of the work and exploitation argument is “Does someone *else* benefit *a lot* from a viewer’s efforts” rather than “does the viewer herself benefit?” It depends on the lens through which one is looking. Through a Marxist lens, it is exploitation. Through another lens, producers work on creating entertainment products that can be embraced or rejected by the viewing audience. In a free market society, if the audience does not embrace the productions, the producer is not guaranteed any income for all her efforts. Could that not be considered exploitation as well (all that work with no financial benefit)? My artistic background feeds directly into the lens I use, which is one that foregrounds creative agency. I know many people freely choose to participate in creative acts regardless of whether others directly or indirectly benefit from them. How others benefit is not necessarily foregrounded in the minds of producers creating this “work.”

Mike Rose lists in *The Mind at Work: Valuing the Intelligence of the American Worker* many internal, cognitive benefits workers receive when they participate in work. To assume that any company or person of authority above a worker is by definition exploitive, simply because they have a supervisory capacity or power to terminate a worker is to deny that workers are able to glean from their work any benefit other than financial. Granted, with or without a Marxist lens, exploitation is possible, but mutual benefit is also possible, and in the context of entertainment, that is more likely. In the situation of *Explosion Bus*, exploitation issues are not really as potentially pronounced since the content providers did not make any financial profit from viewer efforts. Ultimately, production of *Explosion Bus* stopped because the creators could not afford to continue. Issues of exploitation become more pronounced when a product is successful, as often there is a socially driven “line in the sand” regarding what an acceptable amount of income is, and when it is deemed “greed.”

It is important though to consider notions of “work” and “exploitation,” as most countries tied to the Internet operate in a capitalistic society. However, that is only one lens. To illustrate this concept of mutual benefit, friends on Facebook are able to participate on a regular basis in conversations that are surreptitiously feeding off of their data, conversations, photographs, relationships and providing profits for other people. Douglas Rushkoff is completely correct when he says, “We are not Facebook’s customers at all ... Facebook’s real customers are the companies who actually pay them for this data and for access to our eyeballs in the form of advertisements”⁶ (Rushkoff, 2011b, para. 7). However, if one looks at Facebook and other websites through a service or utility lens, with this service, human connections and conversations are made possible, and this service provides a benefit to each Facebook “friend.” There is

⁶“Rushkoff, D. (23 Sept. 2011) “Does Facebook really care about you?” *CNN.com*. Retrieved from <http://www.rushkoff.com/you-are-not-facebooks-customer/> .

absolutely no guarantee that any of Facebook's advertisers will be compensated with any purchases, merely because users saw their ads while spending time "working:" making comments, liking links and posting images in Facebook. Yet, conceptualizing the audience as a group of students provides another lens that elevates the idea that the individuals viewing the content are already receiving some benefit or achieving some type of gratification.

ONLINE AUDIENCES: AUDIENCE INTERACTIVITY AND SENTIMENT ANALYSIS

Although online audiences are potentially global, analytics show that most webpages that provide content generally draw a much smaller individual viewership than broadcast television. Therefore, commodification becomes even more challenging, and producers who have worked in traditional broadcasting, and yielded even modest viewership there, may not be aware of this disparity in viewership numbers. Even "viral" video content that generates thousands or millions of viewers⁷ may not yield a revenue stream comparable to that of revenue generated via traditional and centralized network structures. Says Adweek.com:

There are 283 million television viewers monthly (the population of the United States is 313 million), each watching an average of 146 hours of TV. Compare that with 155 million online video viewers averaging just shy of six hours monthly on mobile and almost six and a half hours over the Web. So while TV's audience is still almost twice that of digital video, the amount of money in digital isn't even 5 percent of the mammoth \$74 billion chunk of change in television. (Thielman, 2014, para. 2)

So if measuring the number of viewers is not the most accurate method of assessing audience interest, online there is the option of more direct communication. This case study triangulates creative acts viewers with some basic analytic data of the official and YouTube

⁷ Psy's Korean pop music video Gangnam Style recently became the first video on YouTube to achieve 2 billion views. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9bZkp7q19f0>

websites. This is due to current scholarship on the efficacy of such qualitative data. Phillip M. Napoli has done extensive scholarship on audiences from a business point of view. He also concludes that in this new era where quantitative data can be artificially inflated and manipulated, and where audiences have new avenues for contributing to content and online discussions, the focus on quantitative data is no longer as effective. In *Audience Evolution: New Technologies and the Transformation of Media Audiences*, Napoli maintains that “the range of questions that can be effectively answered via traditional ratings analysis is narrowing” (Napoli, 2011, p. 171). The quantitative methods used for decades were developed in an age where audiences could not communicate as quickly via alternative data streams. With the synaptic and expansive interactivity possible on the Internet, as well as the expanding number of measurement tools being developed for Internet users, this is no longer the case. Napoli asserts,

More appropriate would be an alternative approach in which ratings analysis is defined in terms of the source and purpose of the data being analyzed. That is, ratings analysis may be more usefully defined as the analysis of the data (whatever their orientation) used by media industry stakeholders to assess performance and success in the audience marketplace. (Napoli, 2011, p.171)

Therefore, “alternative criteria for monetizing media audiences—such as recall, engagement, and appreciation—emerge alongside exposure” (Napoli, 2011, p.171) as a reliable data stream of audience measurement. Although I agree with Napoli that measuring the number of people exposed to an online series will not reveal interest level or engagement, exposure is a better indicator online than it is in traditional broadcasting, since finding and clicking on content are more self-initiated activities than viewing an appointment-based television broadcast. By virtue of the fact that content is not automatically found online without the typed input of the

viewer, this changes a great deal about the importance of why these viewers sought this content out as opposed to passively watching a pushed television show via line-of-sight or cable television network. The onus of finding content has become part of the role or work of the audience member and this project takes Napoli's suggestion of using qualitative methods alongside of the quantitative data to see what they may reveal about the audience.

This approach is in line with the path the audience measurement industry has recently been taking. According to Mike Proulx and Stacy Shepatin (2011), alternative streams of more qualitative data are gaining importance to marketers and content providers, such as Bluefin, Trendrr and SocialGuide (2012, p. 130). However, it is also interesting that industries are still resistant to letting go of former practices. Says Geri Wang, President of Sales and Marketing at ABC, "The default mechanism is absolutely the Nielsen rating. We wake up to that report card every single morning and it is still a very useful tool (Proulx and Shepatin, 2011, p.113).

However, audience researchers are seeing a significant increased need to provide alternative and supplementary data to answer questions previous measuring instruments could not ascertain. So important is this qualitative data that the Advertising Research Foundation (ARF), and since April 2010, The Alta Plana Corporation, have been offering a series of national "Sentiment Analysis Symposia,"⁸ where the latest in best practices are discussed and debated, as well as lectures that explain the "business value in opinions, emotions, and attitudes in social media, news, and enterprise feedback."⁹

The field continues to evolve. Audience analyst and sponsor of the Sentiment Analysis Symposium, Seth Grimes, quotes Steven Rappaport, author of *Listen First!: Turning Social Media Conversations Into Business Advantage* (Wiley, 2011) as saying 2011 was the height of

⁸ <http://sentimentsymposium.com/about.html>

⁹ <http://sentimentsymposium.com/index.html>

the “social media listening” movement.¹⁰ Yet, Grimes claims that listening has already “stalled” (Grimes, 2013). Analysts have already begun to see the limits of online mentions of cultural products as having any direct correlation to potential consumer purchasing or viewing habits.

Limitations of Sentiment Analysis

Scholars of sentiment analysis agree that whereas an analysis of alternative data streams (other than quantitative demographics, website visits or “hits”) rounds out useful audience information, qualitative data has its own challenges, especially if measurement is being run through automated algorithms. Many companies look at customer comments, blogs or reviews and run them through automated applications that rate overall sentiment—more often than not, into positive or negative. Sometimes a third classification of neutral is scored. These are rather simplified classifications of human opinion.

Ronan Feldman, Professor of Information Systems at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem, cites problems at five levels within this industry:

1. Document-level sentiment analysis
2. Sentence-level sentiment analysis
3. Aspect-level sentiment analysis
4. Comparative sentiment analysis
5. Sentiment lexicon acquisition (Feldman, 2013, pp. 83-86)

If a document is coded at the document level (level 1), it assumes that the entire sentiment within that document is in complete agreement with itself; if the sentiment is coded as positive, there are no negative nuance statements within that document. That may not be the case. This problem can also happen if an overall sentiment is coded at the sentence level of a document. The first

¹⁰ Seth, Grimes: <http://www.informationweek.com/software/information-management/the-rise-and-stall-of-social-media-listening/d/d-id/1109113?>

part of a sentence can indicate a positive sentiment followed by the word “but.” Algorithms need to allow a coding score for each part of the sentence or nuance is lost (level 2).

Aspect-level (level 3) refers to sentiments relating to aspect or attributes of an entity. For instance, a positive sentiment may be expressed about the gas mileage and aesthetic design of a car, but the brakes do not work correctly. More minor attributes may be cited positively, but a single attribute that is critical to the safety of a customer needs to be weighted appropriately.

Often, a comparative analysis (level 4) has its own challenges: For example, a statement such as, “This was better than the last version, which was completely useless,” actually may be coded as positive by an algorithm, but when reviewed by humans, it can be seen that the sentiment was really meant to be taken as negative or marginally positive. Comparative statements also depend on context—who is doing the measuring? A consumer comment that declares “Toyota’s SUVs are far better than Ford’s SUVs” is a positive sentiment if the researchers are from Toyota, but a negative statement if they are from Ford.

Researchers create libraries of words (lexicons) that code for definitions and assign intensities of positive or negative sentiments. Feldman’s problem with lexicon acquisition (level 5) refers to the issues inherent in creating lexicons from which algorithms draw their sentiment scores. For instance, the phrase “This record was BAD” would typically refer to a negative attitude. Yet as a slang comment, it could be meant as a positive. Or, it could be just a neutral statement of fact, as in the name of Michael Jackson’s album released in 1987. These issues are important to remember when examining comments of consumers, readers, viewers, etc. One other issue, as Kyle Dent of the Palo Alto Research Center points out, is also that “people don’t talk in keywords” (Dent, 2013) and often algorithms do not assist well with metaphoric language (Kozareva, 2013), or misspellings and missing words (Feldman, 2013, p. 89).

Sentiment analysis is actually a form of “corpus linguistics;” analysts examine the uses of written language via “audience measurement systems” incorporated in software algorithms (such as Empath, MySmark, Decooda, etc.). These “lexicons,” are lists of written terms, which are created to analyze the level of sentiment an online user expresses. Sentiment can be very simple (positive, neutral, negative), or complex (Likert scales, written comments, written documents, etc.). The range of sentiment expression could be associated with a level of audience involvement. For instance, if a viewer likes a YouTube video and views only one episode, she can express that simple “like” by logging into her YouTube account and clicking “Like.” That activity shows a positive interest in the video. However, a more-engaged viewer might be more inclined to write a longer comment, which can articulate anything from simply saying “I like this show” to several reasoned paragraphs expressing an intertextual depth to her appreciation of the video.

Sentiment analysts use lexicons, which gather words into algorithms that interpret user sentiment. However, there are other challenges in relying on algorithms to usefully interpret written language. For instance, algorithms cannot detect sarcasm. As stated earlier, misspellings, slang and missing words also complicate readability of written comments online (Feldman, 2013, 89). Algorithms also do not really work when analyzing viewer-generated videos created out of response (positive, neutral or negative) to other online content. Even if an algorithm can rightfully determine overall audience sentiment analysis, positive feelings do not necessarily lead to a quantifiable or monetizable change in audience member behavior. Feelings do not necessarily result in increased viewership, increased revenue from repeated webpage views, or purchases of advertised products.

Although Sentiment analysis has its limits, I maintain that a qualitative analysis of viewer activities will reveal more information about audience response than analytics alone. Content providers should consider and examine viewer creative acts across all these five levels without a focused reliance upon algorithms. Another benefit of using online creative content is that so much of it is traceable, time-stamped and publicly available. Granted, qualitative data has further complications regarding audience measurement.

Online Audiences: Complications of Quantitative Data and Audience Manufacture

Even though I have access to a lot of data from the *Explosion Bus* and YouTube websites, there are complications from relying on that data. Says Fernando Bermejo, “[T]he panorama of the web audience measurement industry seems much more varied and complex than that of the audience measurement industry of other media” (Bermejo, 2009, p. 217). Scholars such as Bermejo, Napoli and Karen Buzzard have all done extensive scholarship on the history and issues of ratings, audience measurement and audience manufacture as these industries move into the digital era. Each scholar has cited inaccuracies and limitations of various audience instruments, all of which are incapable of measuring the internal motivations of audience members while they watch programming and advertisements.

In *Everyone’s A Critic: Television Without Pity.com and the Dynamics of Audience Agency*, Sandra Falero asserts that with an industrial perspective, audiences “become abstracted from real people, whose behaviors and ideas may not be compatible with the expectations of their assigned demographic category” (Falero, 2011, p. 11). Although traditional media industries literally count on demographics and ratings to guide the ways in which their cultural products are crafted and advertising is commodified, the practice of audience measurement has always been problematic. This is not only because data collection often does not accurately

reflect the measure of actual, active attention paid to content, but exposure does not necessarily lead to engagement. As Levy and Windahl assert, “From a simplistic perspective, exposure means little more than being in the physical presence of media messages” (Levy & Windahl, 1984, p. 60). Yet, Levy & Windahl also believe “exposure” is more complicated than that, because viewers constantly make meaning and decode content while these messages are received, even if the viewer is not actively engaged with content she is exposed to. Also the demographic grouping of viewers is not as simplistic as the industry would indicate, since all members of a group do not possess a completely homogenous attitude and behavior. Online, this practice is further problematized as many users “play” with the concept of their identities when providing personal information to various communities. Prime examples of this include the images Facebook users select to identify themselves in their account profiles.

Philip Napoli states, “[T]oday’s reconfigured dynamics of mass communication compel us to revisit the relevance and analytical utility of foregrounding the work of the audience” (Napoli, 2008, p.4). However, a question closely related to this project is, “What is the work of the content provider, now that the work of audience members has shifted?” To answer that, we should look at what has shifted in the audience. Digital affordances and compositional tools that were not available to viewers in traditional broadcasting can be a vibrant source of assessment to content providers.

As mentioned, Napoli cites a continuum of audience exposure and behaviors, which moves from awareness, to interest, to exposure, which splits into attentiveness and loyalty, to appreciation/emotional response, to being able to recall information regarding content, to having

a positive attitude about the content, to finally engaging in behaviors motivated by the content.¹¹ This continuum is highly pertinent to this dissertation for such a framework identifies and tracks levels of engagement of any audience, including those online. The more time and effort spent on a creative response might infer higher viewer interest, for a viewer who chooses to voluntarily devote time to such activities would not be likely to spend time on a voluntary task they weren't engaged with. Still, it may not explain why those viewers are motivated and others are not. Higher engagement also doesn't necessarily mean viewers will participate in an activity that the content provider desires. Napoli is doing much research in this area as academics join with corporations toward "a redefinition of audience value" within these spaces (Napoli, 2013, 40:56 video timeline).

Audience measurement is definitely complicated in the digital age. Karen Buzzard notes three important shifts in audience behavior in the twenty-first century: the greater segmentation (splintering) of audiences, time-shifting and place-shifting (Buzzard, 2012, p.5). Greater audience segmentation comes from the increase of content providers and channels—broadcast, cable, and online. No longer is programming limited to three major networks. Time-shifting allows audiences to no longer be bound by the programming schedule of content providers. In recent decades, thanks to recording devices such as VHS/DVD recorders and TiVo, audience members are increasingly watching programming on their own schedule. Place-shifting refers to the fact that people are no longer tied to viewing their favorite programming on a stationary television set in their living rooms. More recently, thanks to mobile devices, programming has become portable. Therefore, greater control is in the hands of viewers than in the past.

Along with these shifts, Napoli specifies other issues that impact audience measurement:

¹¹ Philip M. Napoli: *Audiences as Consumers, Audiences as Citizens*. Lecture given at USC Annenberg School for Communication and Journalism on 12 March 2013. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=afL11eOBTZE>. Retrieved 11 April 2014.

1. Only a small percentage of all content is measured.
2. Exposure does not necessarily result in engagement. That is why examining how viewers comment on, reinterpret, or even reimagine the original artifact(s) might be more telling than counting audience mere exposure to content.
3. Furthermore “the ways in which new analytic data are developed and implemented are so different from each other, it begs the question, are they all measuring the same audience?” (Napoli, 2013)

Another issue with quantitative data is the way in which the numbers can be wrongfully perceived, manipulated, and/or artificially inflated; a video with a thousand views doesn't necessarily mean that a thousand unique people actually watched it. It could mean an individual was paid to mimic visits that appear in the analytic data to resemble a thousand distinct visitors. In fact, an individual does not even need to have ever watched the video.¹² Conversely, sometimes there might even have been multiple people exposed to a single video event, although the analytics only register a single triggering click as a single view.

Bermejo believes that traditional audience measurement is further complicated in the digital era due to two logistical differences between it and online audience measurement. Online audience development “has clearly been led by all the buyers—advertisers and agencies” (2009, p. 215). The problem with this is that these stakeholders are trying to hold to the methods that have been used with past media formats in spite of the differences of push versus pull media, with the expectation that using the same sorts of data across media platforms “will help media

¹² A commercial for the Adobe Marketing Cloud illustrates this well. In the commercial, employees at the fictional Encyclopedia Atlantica are excited to notice a spike in online orders for Encyclopedias. “We’re back,” announces the head of the company and immediately production of encyclopedias gets into full swing. It is then revealed that there is a baby in a home repeatedly clicking a button on a laptop on the floor. He is clicking the “ORDER” button on Atlantica’s website. Granted, that couldn’t happen without login information, but the idea is possible. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZK3rBQSA3xI>

buyers and advertisers alike once we can truly compare different media to each other and have it make sense.” “I’m willing to sacrifice accuracy for consistency,” one executive was quoted as having said¹³ (Cleland, 1998, para. 18). Again, El Mystico Logic comes to mind.

Another problem Bermejo cites is that online media has opened the door for varied measurement tools and systems. Personally, I think this is a good thing, since few companies are relied upon for data with traditional media; more systems might allow for greater triangulation of information, and therefore accuracy. However, Bermejo makes a good point that there already has been a problem with standardization of data gathering practices:

[T]he deficiencies and limitations of each of the different methods open the door to the proposal of new methods, variations on the ones already in use, or combinations with them, with the ensuring instability that this introduces in the industry. (Bermejo, 2009, p. 216)

Online units of measurement are more difficult to identify, as is a universally recognized common currency of exchange in online audience measurement. Bermejo suggests “[T]hat currency does not yet exist, and it is possible that it might not ever exist” (2009, 217).

Although quantitative data should not be as foregrounded as in traditional broadcasting, for smaller companies, quantitative data can still play a role in suggesting viewership habits. When viewing numbers are really low, the likelihood is that these statistics have not been tampered with or artificially inflated.

Online Audiences: Social/Fan Communities and the Human Side of Networks

Online networks and fan communities often form organically, and there are many examples of online communities that promote changes in behavior and/or a call to action—not

¹³ In *Media Buying & Planning: Marketers Want Solid Data on Value of Internet Ad Buys*, Kim Cleland quotes Shawn Conly, the Worldwide Interactive Advertising Manager at Intel Corp.

just mere interest in passively watching entertainment content. Because connectivity has yielded social benefits, not just a sense of communal interest in a celebrity or television show, it is germane to examine such examples provided by online communities as well as how individuals connect with others in order to achieve goals.

One early (and somewhat famous) incident of an online community solving a problem and seeking justice involved a lost Sidekick (an older electronic device used for communicating and storing contacts and content). A soon-to-be bride left her Sidekick (with all her wedding plan information on it) in the back of a New York taxi cab. The full story can be found via *Welcome to the Stolen Sidekick Page* (Guttman) explaining how the Sidekick was recovered with the help of many complete strangers putting their virtual heads together. Clay Shirky's *Here Comes Everybody* and *Cognitive Surplus*, as well as Thomas Friedman's *The Earth is Flat* are full of almost utopian examples.

Henry Jenkins' blog series "If It Doesn't Spread, It's Dead," which evolved into his 2013 book *Spreadable Media*, also provided examples of how networked humans can achieve goals within society. He even discussed the origins of the pop culture game "Six Degrees of Kevin Bacon." Another issue with quantitative data is the way in which the numbers can be perceived, manipulated, and/or artificially inflated; a video with a thousand views doesn't necessarily mean that a thousand unique people actually watched it. It could mean an individual was paid to mimic visits that appear in the analytic data to resemble a thousand distinct visitors. In fact, an individual doesn't even need to have ever watched the video.¹⁴ Conversely, sometimes

¹⁴ A commercial for the Adobe Marketing Cloud illustrates this well. In the commercial, employees at the fictional Encyclopedia Atlantica are excited to notice a spike in online orders for Encyclopedias. "We're back," announces the head of the company and immediately production of encyclopedias gets into full swing. It is then revealed that there is a baby in a home repeatedly clicking a button on a laptop on the floor. He is clicking the "ORDER" button on Atlantica's website. Granted, that couldn't happen without login information, but the idea is possible. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZK3rBQSA3xI>

there might even have been multiple people exposed to a video, although the analytics only register a single triggering click as a single view.

Stanley Milgram's 'Six Degrees of Separation' study,¹⁵ where 160 Nebraskans were instructed to send a letter to a particular stockbroker in Boston by giving it to someone they thought was socially closer to that person. As is now widely known, it took roughly six people for each letter to reach its destination. When [Malcolm] Gladwell [in *The Tipping Point*] analyzed the study he discovered that it was the same three friends of the stockbroker who provided the final link, and this is where the "influencers" theory comes from, determining that certain connectors are more important than others. (Jenkins, 2009a, para. 3)¹⁶

Six people in a social chain seem like a small-enough-yet-effective network. Asking someone to deliver (or "push") a letter up a chain of just five people seems a relatively small request. However, if the favor were a little more costly socially—i.e., if moving the letter up the chain were expensive, inconvenient, if it involved asking another favor of someone already put-upon, or if it were expected that others in the chain would have to exert themselves to find and "pull" this information in their direction—it would become readily apparent that something else is at play. Plus, not every hub within a network contains the same strength of connection as another. Milgram asserts that certain circles of people may have no direct connection with others at all (Milgram, 1967, p. 66). Online users are people who have access to the Internet. Not everyone has that connection. Milgram states "when we speak of five intermediaries, we are talking about an enormous psychological distance between the starting and target points ... We should think of the two points as being not five persons apart, but 'five circles of acquaintances' apart—five 'structures' apart" (Milgram, 1967, p.67). Although a more rhizomatic model of

¹⁵ Milgram, S. (1967) The small world problem. *Psychology Today*. Vol. 1. (1) 60–67.

¹⁶ The fifth installment of *If It Doesn't Spread, It's Dead*,
http://henryjenkins.org/2009/02/if_it_doesnt_spread_its_dead_p_4.html.

social networks bypasses some aspects of traditional hierarchies, the act of asking a favor of just five people will yield different results for different people within different circles.

Some people have more influence socially. How do they establish that influence? Why some people and not others? Traditional audience measurement systems believe certain demographics are key to answering these types of questions and this belief has led the industry to declare certain demographics more desirable than others. Milgram notes in his study that some people in the chains were more active because of their geographic residence, and others became more important because of the public nature of their occupations (Milgram, 1967, p.66). These factors are not necessarily quite as critical online, but they do point in the direction of attributes to look for in individual audience members.

Futurist David Pearce Harper (2013) says that “Social networking will become the new normal way of organizing personal life, of marketing goods and services, and of managing enterprises” (Pearce Harper, 2013). In their “Internet and American Life Project” conducted in 2010, The Pew Research Center in Washington, DC, studied how Americans become involved in groups due to developments in social media technology (2010). Pew used the term “groups” rather than networks or social networks and found that

75% of Americans are active in one kind of group or another. Internet and cell phone owners are more likely than non-technology users to be active in groups. Fully 80% of internet users are active in one kind of group or another, compared with 56% of non-internet users; and 86% of cell owners are active in a group, compared with 62% of non-

cell owners ... Furthermore, those who are active in social media are among the most heavily involved group participants. (Rainie, et al. 2010, para. 2)¹⁷

More relevant to this project, Pew's study further broke down the types of groups that most Internet users were typically members of, and found that only "6% are active in fan groups for a particular TV show, movie, celebrity, or musical performer" (Pew, 2011). The group with the highest number of affiliated participants concerned "church groups or other religious or spiritual organizations." Forty percent of adults claimed they were active in these faith-based groups (Rainie, et al., 2010, para. 6).

Such data relate to the problematic nature of initiating and attempting public relations (PR) promotion via social media within the relational logistics of a fan community's networks, which are comprised of hubs (nodes) and spaces between the nodes. To do well within a conversational space, one has to understand that human relationships are key. However, relationships are complex things to cultivate. Christine Hine says, [T]he benefits of online research do not arise automatically from the technology, but require considerable sensitivity and reflection on the part of the researcher. A learning process, focusing on the development of new sociability skills, is to be expected (Hine, 2005, p.20).

The Internet's social connectivity makes finding and sharing content possible. Yet, to expect audience members to take on the role of sharing content, one has to take into account how individual Internet users are taking on roles in relating to each other. If only six percent of adults gather around an entertainment product, this could mean that the total number within one's network may be very small indeed. Social networks are constantly shifting. The meaning of

¹⁷ Rainie, L. Purcell, K and Smith, A.(2011). The Social Side of the Internet: Section 1: The state of groups and voluntary organizations in America. 18 January, 2011. <http://www.pewinternet.org/2011/01/18/section-1-the-state-of-groups-and-voluntary-organizations-in-america/> Viewed 22 March 2014.

content also shifts as it moves into new networks. Ann Wysocki and Johndan Johnson Eilola point out the ephemeral nature of communications within and across networks and technologies:

If we understand communication not as discrete bundles of stuff that are held together in some unified space, that exist linearly through time, and that we pass along, but as instead different possible constructed relations between information that is spread out all before us, then ... living becomes movement among (and within) sign systems. (Wysocki & Eilola, 1999, p. 366)¹⁸

So, once information crosses from node to node it may take on different meanings. In the very subjective case of entertainment, one person's sensibilities may not be shared by everyone within their circle of social contacts. As a loyal fan takes on the role of spreading content to her friends, they may not share the same amount of enthusiasm for that content and, as a result, the spreading will stop once it has crossed into their network.

Another consideration within the notion of cultivating audiences and observing their activities (also mentioned in Jenkins' blog series) comes from Lewis Hyde's *The Gift: Imagination and the Erotic Life of Property* (1983), which describes two different types of economies that can exist in the same space, but operate from fundamentally different priorities: gift economy vs. commodity culture (Hyde, 1983, p. 96). In a gift economy, there is value, but it is not put into monetary terms. Says Hyde, "[A] commodity has value and a gift does not. A gift has worth" (Hyde, 1983, pp. 77-78). Hyde quotes from Marx that "English authors continued to write 'worth' for 'use-value' and 'value' for 'exchange-value'"¹⁹ (Marx, 1930, p. 4). Marx distinguishes the terms "use-value" and "exchange-value" this way:

¹⁸ Wysocki, Anne., and Johndan Johnson-Eilola. (1999). *Blinded by the Letter*. Passions, Pedagogies, and 21st Century Technologies. Ed Hawisher And Self. Utah State UP.

¹⁹ Marx, K. (1930). *Capital: a critique of political economy – vol. 1*. Trans. Paul, E. & Paul, C. New York: E.P. Dutton.

Exchange value, at first sight, presents itself as a quantitative relation, as the proportion in which values in use of one sort are exchanged for those of another sort, a relation constantly changing with time and place. Hence, exchange value appears to be something accidental and purely relative, and consequently an intrinsic value ... (Marx, 1930, p. 43)

Using a coat as an example, Marx describes use-value in this way:

The coat is a use-value that satisfies a particular want. Its existence is the result of a special sort of productive activity, the nature of which is determined by its aim, mode of operation, subject, means, and result ... In this connexion (sic) we consider only its useful effect. (Marx, 1930, p. 48)

A gift's "value" comes in the form of prestige, connection or some elusive social sensibility. Commodity cultures harken back to traditional hierarchical business models—a world where companies provide a product in exchange for monetary payment. In considering the strategy of *Explosion Bus*, Tom Snyder was offering a product for free. Yet his hope to have the EB audience somehow pay financially to keep his small staff working and sustainable was a jump into commodity culture. A consideration of Hyde's perspective is useful as it pertains to Snyder's desires for greater engagement, as viewers operating within a "gift" mentality may be resistant to being used for the commodification of "free" web entertainment and perhaps misinterpret revenue streams for profit rather than sustainability.

Along with the social nuances of gift vs. commodification cultures, measuring audience interest and engagement via creative responses requires a human to analyze relational and human nuances in the data. Steven Rosenbaum in *Curation Nation* asserts that in spite of the focus on technological advancements, society still needs humans to aggregate, direct and promote cultural products, activities, and causes to members of online communities:

Speech is easy; being heard is hard and getting harder, because computers can't distinguish between human intellect and aggregated text and links. This lack of esthetic intelligence in a tsunami of data changes the game....No longer is the algorithm in charge. Human curators have become essential software. What emerges is new human and computer collaboration. (Rosenbaum, 2011, p. 12)

Individuals only join networks they can find and one particularly critical challenge of any content provider is that of getting content in front of viewer's eyes. Actor-Network Theory, a framework that describes actors and actants within networks, may consider the inanimate as important as the animate, but the traditional understanding of the term community, after all, foregrounds the presence of human beings. The key to finding a voice online is in joining (articulating) with other human voices. Clay Shirky celebrates this phenomenon in his recent works documenting how online communities join together and are able to bring about anything from personal entertainment, to charity work and even to social change. Everything seems to hinge on which network's individuals choose to identify and communicate with. Social media allows different networks to connect based on the overall linkages of its members. Peter Moreville has said that "Markets are conversations" (102), which also implies that distinct voices are in dialog with each other. Moreville's scholarship focuses on the challenge of *finding* and *making findable* cultural products within this ever-shifting, expanding, conquering, capturing, and off-shooting,²⁰ rhizomatic Internet. James G. Webster points out that not only is an enormous amount of online content being added every minute of every day, but most of the old content is not going away (Webster, 2014, p. 4).

²⁰ Deleuze, G. & Guattari, F. The original quote is "The rhizome operates by variation, expansion, conquest, capture, offshoots" from page 409.

Moreville's term "findable" speaks from the perspective of a seeking user. Learning scholar Dave Cormier rightly draws a distinction between Moreville's term findable and the term "discoverable." People often use the term findable when, in fact, they mean discoverable. Says Cormier, "If you're going to find something, you already know what it is."²¹ So "findable" refers to the quality of content that people already are aware of, search for specifically and can find within a sea of other content. Discoverable refers to the quality of content that people are not already aware of—they stumble upon it while searching for other content.

Henry Jenkins, on the other hand, uses the term "spreadable," which implies a more offensive tactic on the part of the content creator who can take advantage of the content's ability to flow through and between interconnected networks thanks to interested and participating network members. One obstacle of spreadability could be what Eli Pariser calls *The Filter Bubble*. As a user regularly searches for a certain type of content online, filters are noting her current and past search information and modifying an algorithm that will redirect her future searches. This could have an adverse effect on the free availability of information. Says Pariser, "First the filter bubble surrounds us with ideas with which we're already familiar (and already agree), making us overconfident in our mental frameworks. Second, it removes from our environment some of the key prompts that make us want to learn" (p. 84).

Another social challenge to audience viewership is finding *desirable* content. Ann Wysocki advises designers of New Media texts, "You will need to question not only what happens on pages and screens and how what is on pages or screens asks readers to respond, but also how audiences come to consider certain texts as worth reading" (p. 160). So, audiences are not only challenged to find content, they have to sift through content they disregard. Likewise,

²¹ Cormier, D. (2013). *Coolcast with Jeff Lebow: Dave Cormier on rhizomatic learning*. Recorded 10 November 2011. Retrieved 8 June 2013. <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=psLE4VfHfyE>.

content providers have to sift through user-generated sentiment and content to gather a sense of their audiences' engagement and determine whether content is useful. The extent to which a web series is difficult to follow or is somehow ambiguous could adversely impact the content's desirability to viewers, even once that content has been discovered.

Audience Attraction to Media Entertainment, Online Complications and a Return to Qualitative Measurement

Nielsen ratings count the viewers and households watching a televised program and the percentage of the program they are exposed to, but ratings do not reveal *how engaged* the viewers are at the time they are exposed to it, nor *why* viewers watch. When considering media content and the roles of audience members, it is important to consider the basic human desires that individuals seek to satisfy when choosing to spend their time engaged with the content.

To address the internal motivations of television viewing and the differences between online viewing and broadcast television, some scholars utilize an older tool (Rubin, Webster, Bondad-Brown and Pearce), the Uses and Gratifications (U&G) framework developed by Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch, and published in 1974. Using U&G, Bondad-Brown et al. consider the internal needs that media gratifies. "U&G posits that social and psychological factors affect media orientation and media use" (p. 23). "Several assumptions underlie U&G ... People are active participants who purposively select their media content, influenced by their motivations and past media gratifications" (p. 473).

When considering the *online* environment, Bondad-Brown et al. also examine generational factors at play regarding viewing video programming on the Internet and the context in which viewers consume cultural products (2012, p.475). *Contextual age* looks not merely at surface, logistical, quantitative data gathered in traditional audience measurement tools

(Bondad-Brown et al., 2012, p. 476). In their article in the *Journal of Broadcasting and Electronic Media* (2012), Bondad-Brown et al. examine the factors of generational motivation and contextual age on the activity of user-shared videos online, and compares this activity with traditional television use. Each attribute that is dissimilar changes the potential role of the audience viewer.

In Bondad-Brown's dissertation, she also includes the advantages of traditional television viewing:²²

1. [V]iewing does not require a personal computer, which contributes to a digital divide of those that have access and elderly or lower-income groups. (p. 11)
2. Traditional television broadcasting offers centralized viewing guides (TV guides or broadcasting schedules built-in to cable television interfaces).
3. Without a centralized information center as to what content is offered via which website, online "viewers must be able to effectively search and find content they are seeking." (p. 12)

Advantages to viewing online video content include: There are a wide variety of content creators; access to content on-demand; access to content for repeated viewings; a more interactive and personalized experience; more targeted, fewer, or no advertisements; access to non-professionally produced content and easy content sharing. The rise of online media and feedback technologies such as liking, textual commenting and spaces in other compositional formats have provided conversational space for viewers and, therefore, "the work" of many audience members who choose to participate in these conversations (Bondad-Brown et al, 2012, p. 472).

²² I thought her dissertation research apt to mention although Bondad-Brown neglected to include these in her 2012 article.

Bondad-Brown cites advantages of *online* viewing, which may impact audience attraction to content:

1. [T]he ability to view local broadcast network programs from television stations in other markets” (p. 10).
2. Online video content is not dependent on a schedule; viewers can select programs whenever they feel the need to, or whenever they have free time (p. 10).
3. Often, online video content is enjoyed in short bursts (Einav, 2004). Because of this, a new trend called “video snacking” has emerged (p. 10).
4. Viewers are no longer limited to watching professionally produced programming (p. 11).
5. The rise of online video use has also created a shift from a passive viewing audience to an active content-producing and content-sharing audience (p. 11).

Another advantage ties to Thomas L. Friedman’s concept of “globalizing the local” (477), which describes how individuals can be connected to not only local but global networks thanks to Internet technologies. Each individual’s voice, although situated in a geographic locality, can be literally spread around the world through Internet connections. In the same way, an individual’s influences may come from networks outside of an individual’s neighborhood or home town. *Explosion Bus* was created in Boston with local talent featured on the initial episodes. Audience growth could familiarize remote viewers with Bostonian talent. The same could be said for viewers who sent in 60 audition videos from other states and even England over the course of the show’s run. What is particularly useful about these frameworks and models is that the Internet offers plenty of examples, which substantiate their viability.

Online, engaged viewers are given the opportunity to take on creative roles in varying degrees that expand related content in a way not possible with traditional broadcasting systems. Tied to these advantages are, unfortunately, disadvantages that impact the attraction of viewers to content. Since

there is no centralized TV guide available to Internet users ... viewers must be able to effectively search, find and become aware of content and rely to some extent on recommendations from others. Online video viewing requires a personal computer (PC), mobile phone, or other digital device connected to the Internet, and a broadband connection, which may be costly or simply unavailable for some individuals, especially for older adults. (Fox, 2010)

Moreover, bandwidth caps on mobile Internet subscriptions may discourage those users from accessing video content (Bondad-Brown et al, 2012, p. 472).

The fact that some programming is *only* online also complicates the number of viewers that might discover the series in the first place. Each of the factors mentioned helps or hinders the roles of each individual audience member as well as the series' findability (Moreville, 2005), discoverability (Cormier, 2013), spreadability (Jenkins, 2013b) or, in other words, the availability of content to be discovered by potentially interested individuals. At the Innovation Summit 2013, which focused on the future of TV, Henry Jenkins presided over a panel of industry and academic experts to discuss issues and trends of finding content online. At the summit, Howard Stein, strategist for entertainment for Facebook, said there are those at Facebook who envision a customized television viewing guide. Stein describes,

a future where the *TV Guide* or the TV listings that you get in your programming guide is antiquated. It's incredibly difficult to discover you know what you would like, what kind

of programming is out there. So, imagine a lens by which your programming guide was driven by your identity, your interest graph and what your friends like and what they're viewing and what they're sharing. And you can see an entire paradigm shift in discovery. (Jenkins, 2013a)

Therefore, the more people who are familiar or engaged with content and the more willing they might become to share it within their social networks, the more likely others can find out about that content.

It is also true that on the Internet, content is often found because it is "bundled" with other content, whether it is being offered on the same webpage, or if an algorithm suggests similar videos (as is the practice on YouTube). Also at the Innovation Summit, Hardie Tankersley, vice-president of platforms and innovation at Fox Broadcasting noted that "bundles are really useful. Nobody really wants to pay a la carte, even for news" (Jenkins, 2013a). However, he also adds, "I think you could argue the way that we currently bundle television is inefficient" (Jenkins, 2013a). Therefore, people will play a larger role in spreading the word about content, and the industry wants to learn how to take advantage of that.

Of course, issues such as the lack of a centralized programming schedule, or difficulty discovering content, are not issues normally associated with issues experienced in distance learning. Students typically enroll at a learning institution, register for a particular course and are given a syllabus that directs the learner through course objectives, content, assignments and resources, as well as presents contact information to the instructor (content provider).

Since online entertainment is harder to discover due to the volume and fractured placement of online content, audience measurements and research in viewing habits need to incorporate more than just numbers of viewers that belong to certain demographics. Qualitative

data and specifically sentiment analysis, or “opinion mining,” (Feldman, 2013, p. 82) has become more important in recent years. As seen in the CAB surveys and Crossley’s Next Day Recall Method (p. 35), qualitative data streams were where audience measurement methods originally started. Sentiment analysis measures opinions of online users and can be as simple as selecting a star rating on a 5-star Likert scale on Amazon.com, or clicking “Like” on Facebook, to more elaborate behaviors such as writing brief comments or composing longer blog entries.

The traditional passive and feminized conceptualization of audiences may stem from the mere logistics of traditional “push media,” which offered fewer opportunities for audience expression—either as creatively, individualistically, immediately or directly. Audiences simply did not have access to the multimedia compositional tools needed to create multimodal responses. Internet audience members, on the other hand, have more opportunities to express themselves relative to their level of engagement, and there are many levels of engagement a viewer can express. The scholarship on the subject typically describes engagement in terms of what the viewer does or feels, and the process by which this engagement changes. Scholarship does not look at what *role* a viewer takes on within a fan community or social network, but there are several models that describe engagement along a behavioral continuum.

Philip Napoli conceptualizes audience behavior with a model of “Audience Dimensions” (Napoli, 2011, p. 91), describing audience behaviors along a continuum of a deepening relationship between the audience member and content. The continuum starts at initial awareness of a cultural product, although awareness does not necessarily mean initial exposure. Next, the trajectory moves to general interest in the content, to exposure to the content, which leads to attentiveness and loyalty, then on to appreciation and an emotional response, to recall and changes in attitudes, and finally changes in behavior, which can also have a cyclical trajectory

back to more exposure, more appreciation and more attitude changes. Of course, this could be also part of the rationale advertisers have with exposing more people to their commercials in hopes of influencing viewer behavior. My conceptual framework also includes both McGuire's Communication-Persuasion matrix (McGuire, 2001, p. 32) as well as a "participation" continuum developed by Ross Mayfield that is more specific to fan activities on the web. Content providers can analyze the engagement level of a viewer response by where it appears along this continuum.

Examining the phenomenon of fan devotion to media personas (as opposed to cultural products per se), William Brown cites a cyclical component to audience involvement in a simpler four-step model (Brown, 2011, p. 6), which follows a fan's involvement from "transportation" (being initially transported into the persona's world), to what is called a "Parasocial Interaction" with the persona, where the fan believes they know the persona to some degree personally, to "Identification" with the persona, where the fan's goals, beliefs and behaviors align with the persona's, and, ultimately, what could be referred to as "Worship" of the persona. This extreme level of engagement is exhibited in very few fans of very few celebrities, but can be expressed with a literal altar devoted to the persona, or even in creating a chapel devoted to them (he cites extreme examples of a chapel in India devoted to Elvis and members of the "Manson family" who continue to be loyal to Charles Manson). These levels are pyramidal; the lowest level (transportation) is experienced by the largest number of people. As Brown says, "hundreds of millions of people form parasocial relationships with media personas, a much smaller number of people engage in identification with them and fewer still worship them" (Brown, 2011, p. 23). Brown suggests there is room for additional research, which this

dissertation offers. The data of *Explosion Bus* viewer responses should fall into a similar pyramid-shaped pattern, with fewer responses at a higher parasocial level.

In his Communications-Persuasion matrix (2001), William McGuire suggests that there are 13 resulting steps or levels of output that audience members exhibit that demonstrate the level of their being persuaded: from initial exposure to the communication, to paying attention to it, to liking the communication, to acting on the communication and, ultimately, proselytizing others into similar behavior (McGuire, 2001, p. 32). Also within McGuire's matrix are five components that can be manipulated on the content side of Communication: Source, Message, Channel, Receiver and Destination, which supports the 13 different levels of output variables (McGuire, 2001, p. 32) in various degrees. These output variables correspond to activities of fan participation as delineated in Ross Mayfield's "Power Law of Participation" (2001, p. 74), which will be explained shortly (p. 77). All of these activities are possible when considering entertainment and/or education as a Field of Cultural Production (Bourdieu), and provide opportunities for engagement assessment.

Cristel Russell, Andrew T. Norman and Susan E. Heckler did further research on viewer perception of connectedness (attachment) to television shows, including attachment to specific personas of actors or characters on those shows. They cited three "connections within television consumption:" viewer-to-television program (vertical connection), viewer-to-viewer (horizontal connectedness) and viewer-to-characters within the program ("verizontal" connectedness) (Russell et al., 2004, p. 278). These connections easily mirror the "three types of interaction" in online courses that help foster engagement in students: "Learner-Content," "Learner-Teacher"

and “Learner-Learner” (Moore, 1989, p. 1).²³ Russell et al. went on to describe several attributes regarding the concept of connectedness:

1. Connectedness deepens and intensifies over time (p. 281)
2. Women are more likely to engage in higher levels of connectedness than men (p. 281)
3. Connectedness correlates to interpersonal influence (p. 281)
4. “Highly imaginal” (creative) viewers will connect to shows that give them opportunities to let their imaginations run wild (p. 282)
5. Optimum Stimulation Levels, or OSLs, refer to “the concept that every individual seeks to maintain a certain level (or optimum level) of stimulation (p. 282). The viewers with lower OSLs will seek out comfortable, more familiar shows (p. 283)
6. Connectedness is more likely to occur in shows that the viewer can use to “cultivate and express their self-concept” (p. 284)
7. Connectedness is more likely to occur in shows that trigger a process of identification and social comparison with the characters (p. 284)
8. Higher connectedness will increase the effectiveness of product placement (p. 285)
9. Higher connectedness will lead to a development of fan communities (p. 286)

Each of these attributes could be studied, measured and deemed subjects of further research, but not all will apply to this case study’s context since new shows were only posted across an 18-month period. Attributes four, six and seven are probably most applicable to entertainment videos and could be used as markers for engagement—expressing imagination, self or identification with aspects of the series.

²³ Moore, M. (1989). Three types of interaction. *American Journal of Distance Education*, 3(2), 1–6. Downloaded. August 3 2016.

In October 2004, *Wired* magazine's Chris Anderson wrote of "The Long Tail," which explained how the Internet was causing a shift in business²⁴ "from a focus on a relatively small number of 'hits' (mainstream products and markets) at the head of the demand curve and toward a huge number of niches in the tail" (Anderson, n.d., para. 1). In essence, because of the abundance and availability of online cultural products, the "bottlenecks" of gatekeeper decision-making and distribution industries could be bypassed, and millions of customized niche markets had a chance to succeed.

Pointing out that Anderson's piece only concentrates on public consumption of products, and not production, Internet entrepreneur Ross Mayfield responded with a framework for engagement in his weblog Markets, Technology and Musings. This framework includes not only user-generated creative activities (although some are creative), but also user-shared activities. Called "The Power Law of Participation" (Mayfield, 2006), Mayfield's framework moves along a continuum of 12 measurable activities of online viewers within a network and aligns them in increasing levels of engagement (left to right) and from an individualistic, collective to collaborative intelligence (lower to higher). The activities in order of low to high engagement are: read, favorite, tag, comment, subscribe, share, network, write, refactor, collaborate, moderate and lead (Mayfield, 2006, para. 1). "As we engage with the web," says Mayfield, "we leave behind breadcrumbs of attention. Even when we read, our patterns are picked up in referral logs ... creating a feedback loop" (Mayfield, 2006, para. 3). Whenever we favorite an artifact, it is "a one click action. You don't even have to log in to contribute value, you have Permission to Participate" (Mayfield, 2006, para. 4). A website such as

Del.icio.us taps both personal and social incentives for participation through the low threshold activity of tagging. Remembering the URL is the hardest part, and you have to

²⁴ *The Long Tail* was later published as a book by Hyperion on July 11, 2006.

establish an identity in the system. Commenting requires such identity for sake of spam these days and is an under-developed area. Subscribing requires a commitment of sustained attention which greatly surpasses reading alone. Sharing is the principal activity in these communities, but much of it occurs out of band (email still lives). We network not only to connect, but leverage the social network as a filter to fend off information overload. Some of us write, as in blog, and some of us even have conversations. But these are all activities that can remain peripheral to community. To refactor, collaborate, moderate and lead requires a different level of engagement—which makes up the core of a community. (Mayfield, 2006, para. 4)

Each of Mayfield's lower-level activities fit with activities in this case study and have been included in my conceptual framework later in the Literature Review (p. 97). Although only a couple of the higher-level activities in which users take on responsibilities for the viewing community were achieved, they are included in my framework since the goal is to apply it to similar situations. Additionally, many viewer activities will serve as markers along Napoli's, Brown's, McGuire's, Russell et al.'s, and Mayfield's engagement continua and correspond with standards adapted from the general components within the Quality Matters Rubric (discussed in the next section). By placing the activities along a timeline it will be easier to ascertain whether connectedness deepened or intensified over time (Russell et al.'s model, attribute 1, p. 281), or if higher connectedness led to a development of fan communities (Russell et al.'s model, attribute 2, p. 286). Other attributes, such as increasing "the effectiveness of product placement" (Russell et al.'s model, attribute 2, p. 285), do not apply when content is not supported by commercials.

Similarly, not all of the educational standards or groupings of standards in the Quality Matters Rubric directly applied to the entertainment context and, therefore, were not used in my

suggestions. I immediately modified and adapted applicable groupings of standards and omitted others. For example, creating clear navigation instructions, explaining how to move through the serialized content, and where to find various website components (from QM Course Overview and Introduction Standards) were useful concepts for the webpage. However, in entertainment, there is typically not a need for a “statement which clarifies the relationship between the face-to-face and online components” (QM Standard 1.2b) since online entertainment has no face-to-face components. Neither are viewers required to introduce themselves to other members within the viewing network (QM Standard 1.5). It may happen organically, but is not something that is mandated. The particulars of my rubric standards that were modified for entertainment will be spelled out in the Methods chapter (Chapter 3). Until then, the Literature Review moves toward a more general overview of engagement practices useful for enhancing the teacher-student relationship online.

ONLINE EDUCATION: ENGAGEMENT PRACTICES

Online education has a longer track record than that of entertainment of developing practices, methods, and tools to bridge the distance between teachers (content providers) and their students (viewers). Education has had more time to develop online practices than entertainment, as video streaming technologies developed more slowly in the early days of the Internet. It is critical for teachers to be able to assess whether their content achieves their desired objectives and outcomes. The means by which they do this is through encouraging feedback mechanisms throughout their courses and offering methods of contacting each other. Online education has developed, thrived and even subverted traditional brick and mortar education by being able to broaden enrollments through its affordances, excluding the need for geographical proximity or even temporal synchronicity. However, in eLearning, it is important for students to

still feel part of a community, and distance education professionals have had many years to develop ways for content providers to minimize a sense of isolation and foster connectedness and engagement.

Much research has been done on fostering community in online classes. Alfred Rovai is one scholar who has well documented the cultivation of community in online classes and how techniques of instructional design can address feelings of alienation in online learning among members of different groups and personality types (Rovai, 2005, 2006, 2007). A sense of group cohesion or belonging can help keep distance students of certain personality types more engaged with the material. As stated, sound Instructional Design calls for the curriculum to establish opportunities for the student to engage (a) with the teacher; (b) with the content; and (c) with fellow students (Moore, 1989, p. 1). This approach can be useful to foster community in the context of entertainment as well. To foster engagement of fans, online entertainment should try to offer opportunities for viewers to engage with the content providers (producers), with the content itself and with other fans. However, this project will not focus on the fan community ethnographies, personality types or other demographic categories themselves, but, rather, the broader range of activities of engaged members in a viewing community that might have been impacted by the producers' choices of design, format and subject matter. These choices can enhance, hinder or have no measurable effect on creating a welcoming and user-friendly experience, and the assumption is they similarly will have impacted the engagement of their fan community.

As stated, my Quality Matters Rubric training was the initial foundation of my formatting suggestions in this case study, but this is not to imply that the Quality Matters Rubric is the definitive tool for improving engagement and supporting entertainment objectives. Rubrics such

as QM are successfully used in many higher learning institutions. Many studies have shown that courses reviewed with the Quality Matters course review process can bring about improvements in student engagement and, ultimately, satisfaction. One study²⁵ found that

Overall, students in the redesigned course asked fewer questions, expressed less concern about what they needed to do to succeed, and were less confused about how to navigate the course, find information and locate the course requirements. In addition, student learning and satisfaction increased in the redesigned course. (Legon & Runyon, 2007, p. 4)

I could have started with another tool such as the Sloan Consortium's *Five Pillars of Quality*, The University of Washington's Center for Instructional Development and Research's guidelines for *Actively Engaging Students in Large Classes* (2009), or started by cobbling together my own collection of best practices, but in my experience with the rubric as an instructional developer, the eight general areas that QM encompasses correspond to much of the findings in online Instructional Design research and encapsulate it succinctly. Furthermore, the QM rubric was selected as a foundation because it is already a widely popular tool used by institutions of higher education to improve online courses and make their course quality consistent.

In my work as an instructional technologist, I found my training with the rubric to be highly effective in improving online courses at the university where I worked. That personal experience fed directly into the way I viewed entertainment content and the suggestions I ultimately offered in this case study. Because of my experience, I believed those suggestions could improve viewer experience. At the very least, the modifications would serve as

²⁵ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e6sBaROGMDE>

chronological and measurable markers of content change, which could then be tied to viewers' responses.

The Quality Matters rubric was developed through research that identified and adopted practices that increased clarity of content and perceived quality and, in turn, had the goal of lowering student attrition. According to its introduction, the Quality Matters rubrics

are based on recognized best practices, built on the expertise of instructional designers and experienced online teachers, and supported by distance education literature and research. QM's goal is to enable faculty to increase learner engagement, learning, and satisfaction in online and blended courses by implementing better course design.

(Introduction, 2015. para. 1)

The basic idea is that students are more likely to stay in online courses if objectives are clear and content is presented or scaffolded in a logical progression.²⁶ The QM rubric has been found to be effective in improving the conceptual framework(s) instructors use to create and design course content using technology (TPACK).²⁷ Cheryl Ward of the University of Akron²⁸ finds that the components of QM align very closely to a framework that instructors use when designing courses. The TPACK (technological, pedagogical, content, knowledge) framework describes three basic areas of knowledge instructors need to best develop courses and their various combinations depending on the content:

- Content: Instructors need to know the subject matter
- Technological: Instructors need to know how to use the technology

²⁶ Evaluating the Impact of the Quality matters Review Process on Student and Faculty Perceptions of Course Quality: Tina Parscal, Principle Investigator, University Provost of the University of the Rockies

²⁷ TPACK stands for Technological, Pedagogical, Content Knowledge and is a conceptual framework developed by Lee Shulman. From the article, "Those who understand: Knowledge growth in teaching." *Educational Researcher*, 15(4).

²⁸ The Development of Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge (TPACK) in Instructors Using Quality Matters Training, Rubric, and Peer Collaboration: Cheryl Ward, Principle Investigator, University of Akron

- Pedagogical: Instructors need to know how to communicate this knowledge in a way that fosters learning

These three overarching concepts intersect like a Venn diagram and result in combined areas of knowledge (Ward & Lampner, 2011).

Transactional Distance and Network Broadcasting

Another educational theoretical framework that impacts user (viewer) connectedness is Transactional Distance. This framework bridges concepts of Network Theory (which will be covered in the next section) and eLearning strategies. Developed by Michael Moore and adapted from Dewey's and Bentley's *Knowing and the Known* (1949), Moore defines the terms in his article, *Theory of Transactional Distance* (1997):

The transaction that we call distance education occurs between teachers and learners in an environment having the special characteristic of separation of teachers from learners.

This separation leads to special patterns of learner and teacher behaviours. It is the separation of learners and teachers that profoundly affects both teaching and learning.

With separation there is a psychological and communications space to be crossed, a space of potential misunderstanding between the inputs of instructor and those of the learner. It is this psychological and communications space that is the transactional distance.

(Moore, 1997, p. 22)

In earlier days of television broadcasting, with typically only three television networks to discuss “around the water cooler,” minimizing a sense of viewer distance was not necessarily as much of a concern for national broadcasters—with the noted exception of local children’s television (before it became more nationalized in the 1980s) (Trinklein, 2011). In earlier years and in the larger markets such as New York, Phoenix or Chicago, daily children’s programming

often had local hosts in-between cartoons and other short segments. In the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s, young viewers in the U.S. were invited to visit the studios of locally-produced children's shows in their communities. Children were asked to send in letters, postcards, artwork, personal photographs and contest entries, which would be included in the shows' content. Children who visited the studios were seen and sometimes interviewed on-camera. Often they received prizes directly from the makers and sponsors of the shows. Hosts displayed and discussed viewer correspondences on-air. From the standpoint of engagement, these practices served three purposes: Firstly, they served as a reward to viewers for watching the show. Secondly, the audience became part of the show, thus transforming the producer-audience relationship and thirdly, they served as a means of gauging audience interest in and engagement with the content. In the same way, an online viewer's need for connectedness might be addressed by a content provider's offering ways for the audiences to participate creatively in the content of the show, and be motivated to share this work with others. These activities minimize perceived distance from the entertainment content, personas/characters in the content, and/or even the content providers.

Moore's theory describes three variables of distance education (dialog, structure and learner autonomy) and how they factor into the effectiveness of a course's instructional design. One can see parallels with creating online entertainment content. "Dialogue is developed by teachers and learners in the course of the interactions that occur when one gives instruction and the others respond" (Moore, 1997, p. 21). "Structure expresses the rigidity or flexibility of the programme's educational objectives, teaching strategies, and evaluation methods" (Moore, 1997, p. 23). Learner autonomy describes how students use instructional content

to achieve goals of their own, in their own ways, under their own control ... Learner autonomy is the extent to which in the teaching/learning relationship it is the learner rather than the teacher who determines the goals, the learning experiences, and the evaluation decisions of the learning programme. (Moore, 1997, p. 28)

These variables have similar corresponding components within the world of an online entertainment series—the content itself, the structure of the content and viewer agency. In the same way students gravitate toward certain aspects or applications of their course content, so do viewers of online entertainment. Viewers can become so engaged with it as to appropriate and repurpose the content into creative acts of their own. This Literature Review next looks at the broader perspective of how networks operate online, and how human nodes operate within these social spaces. Lastly, I propose a conceptual framework of my own from all of the scholarship included in this Literature Review. This includes the overarching perspective of Network Theory, the shifting and rhizomatic nature of Internet connectivity and several spatial metaphors one can keep in mind while examining the creative conversation between *Explosion Bus* producers and *Explosion Bus* viewers.

SUMMARIZING AND OPERATIONALIZING THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS

Network Theories and the Shifting Rhizome

A consideration of Network Theory and the attributes of networks are important to consider with this project due to the interconnectedness made possible by the Internet. One attribute pertinent to networks and how they operate is “going viral.” This term describes the almost epidemic spread of content that can make unknown amateurs household names. Because of audience interconnectivity, content and information can be spread quite quickly from a variety of social media and across several platforms—Twitter, Facebook, Instagram, email, blogs, etc.

Although Henry Jenkins spends a lot of time in *Spreadable Media* explaining why he does not like the term “viral,” due to the inference that content “infects” those exposed to it (Jenkins, 2013, pp. 16-23), “viral” is still a term widely used to describe the rapid spread of content across vast numbers of globally interconnected devices. This is because in networked spaces, “Our audiences have audiences of their own,” says Laura Zalaznick, cable and digital executive for NBC Universal²⁹ (Littleton, 2014, para.1).

The rhizome is also a useful model for network theorists (Spinuzzi, 2008, p. 7), as it points to the rather organic, global potential of viewers across the Internet. In *Introduction: The Rhizome*, Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari borrow an eastern biological metaphor to describe a somewhat horizontal, networked, interlocking and shifting series of roots (as opposed to the western, more hierarchical metaphor of a tree growing upward from its foundations) to explain how a society functions:

A rhizome has no beginning or end; it is always in the middle, between things, interbeing, *intermezzo*. The tree is filiation, but the rhizome is alliance, uniquely alliance. The tree imposes the verb “to be,” but the fabric of the rhizome is the conjunction, “and ... and ... and” This conjunction carries enough force to shake and uproot the verb “to be”... The middle is by no means an average; on the contrary, it is where things pick up speed ... The rhizome operates by variation, expansion, conquest, capture, offshoots ... (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 25)

This metaphor is apt with the transient and temporal interests of audiences. As we saw with audience measurement systems such as Nielsen, online measurements are taken almost on a moment-by-moment basis. If a show receives a viewership of a particular rating one week, that

²⁹ Laura Zalaznick of NBCUniversal said at the January 2014 conference of National Association of Television Program Executives.

does not guarantee the same viewership the next. Online content is viewed by an ever-changing, ever-shifting series of networked computers, which are also ever-improving. These technological improvements also impact viewer behavior. Ironically, this organic and biological metaphor also points to Lev Manovich's new media concept of transcoding:

Because new media is created on computers, distributed via computers, and stored and archived on computers, the logic of a computer can be expected to significantly influence the traditional cultural logic of media; that is, we may expect that the computer layer will affect the cultural layer. (Manovich, 2001, p. 46)

In human society, network functions may not be as egalitarian as Deleuze and Guatarri, Shirky, Friedman or Manovich imply. Hierarchies can emerge within networks because certain nodes may possess greater importance, influence, or power due to better equipment, skill sets or relational connections. Nevertheless, transcoding describes how as computers become more networked, society becomes more networked. Conversely, as society becomes more networked, technologies become more networked.

In 2011, most people were not yet watching long-form entertainment on their computers. Since then, the Internet has grown in its streaming capabilities, and even standard television sets, along with viewing and recording devices such as Chromecast, Roku, Firestick, Blue-Tooth and DVD players, have improved their ability to connect with the Internet. So people can now view longer, "pulled" content into their larger, easier-to-view, remote-controlled high-definition television screens, and watch longer content from their comfortable sofas, as they have done for decades prior.

Since a network of viewers is a complex, organic and changing structure, I will only be able to include the assessable activities of viewers who have chosen to respond to content with a

creative act within a viewing network—deeply engaged or not. As stated earlier, exposure to content does not mean engagement, interest nor a change in behavior. Milgram’s study acknowledges there can be “enormous psychological distance between the starting and target points” (Milgram, 1972, p. 67) as he found in his social experiment. Manuel Castells (1996, 2010), Stuart Hall (1996), and John Law (1999, 2001) also use spatial metaphors that describe not only the hubs and nodes of networks, but the spaces between nodes.

In Castells’ *The Rise of Network Society*, the areas between nodes are described as places that facilitate flow or create resistance. Deleuze and Guattari describe smooth and striated spaces—areas that are open and free, or spaces which direct movement into particular directions. Castells describes this phenomenon not as an “either/or,” but rather “the two spaces in fact exist only in mixture: smooth space is constantly being translated, transversed into a striated space; striated space is constantly being reversed, returned to a smooth space” (Castells, 2010, p. 474). Likewise, in *The Marketplace of Attention* (2014), James G. Webster describes the theory of “structuration,” which echoes some of these notions. Structuration describes the perspective that although human beings have a great deal of agency, societal structures guide, direct, and often create limitations on that agency. However, it strikes more of a balance between agency and structures, and explains how some humans are able to “hack” their way around those structures.

Bruno Latour’s Actor Network Theory (ANT) similarly maintains that every hub or node of a network, be it human or non-human, is just as important to the total function of the network. Law agrees since, “Topology concerns itself with spatiality, and in particular with the attributes of the spatial which secure continuity for objects as they are displaced through a space. The important point here is that spatiality is not given. It is not fixed” (Law, 1999, p. 6).

Digital culture scholar Stuart Moulthrop expounds on Deleuze and Guattari's model, saying that "The generating body for all these tropes (the arch rhizome) is the concept of a social order defined by active traversal or encounter rather than objectification" (Moulthrop, 1994, p. 301). In other words, the rhizome describes society more in terms of relational activities between network members rather than more tangible, visceral qualities. Individual viewers share information within their social networks, yet the degree to which this information spreads across these networks, or does not, may be due to other unseen or even immeasurable resistances between nodes. This is something to consider when examining what occurs after a fan of a web series has shared information about the show within their social networks. Neither networks nor audience members are permanently connected to each other in the same way, with the same strength, nor do they necessarily remain connected from episode to episode. Over time, tastes can change. Viewers can become disenchanted with content or even the content providers, for various reasons. New developments impact the amount of time a viewer has to devote to her interests.

Audiences should never be conceptualized as a fixed entity. Even within the eLearning context, an instructor should never assume that a student's interest or participation level is fixed, once her first assessment has been submitted. Encountering and transversing information within a network describes temporary and changing social activities of its members. Articulation Theory describes the constantly shifting, temporary alignment of different entities to achieve certain outcomes (Law & Mol, 2001, p. 615). Stuart Hall defines an articulation as "the form of the connection that *can* make a unity of two different elements, under certain conditions. It is a linkage, which is not necessary, determined, absolute and essential for all time" (Hall, 1996b, p. 141). Latour acknowledges these transitory social linkages:

The main advantage of dissolving the notion of social force and replacing it either by short-lived interactions or by new associations is that it's now possible to distinguish in the composite notion of society what pertains to its durability and what pertains to its substance. (Latour, 2007, p. 66)

So, because networks are not fixed, society can operate in flexible ways. Even after articulations subside, residue of these relationships can remain. Spatiality is not fixed, just as audiences are not fixed. From week to week, and show to show, and even moment by moment, the audience shifts in configuration and composition. The rhizome's shifting nature can be an example of another organic framework, Activity Theory. Kristin Walker describes Activity Theory as "looking particularly at the social interactions involved in the process of creating, communicating, discovering, and discussing knowledge" (Walker, 2005, p. 208). Clay Spinuzzi distinguishes the frameworks of Actor Network Theory and Activity Theory in his book *Network*:

Activity theory [emphasis his] provides a cultural-historical, developmental view of networks grounded in the orientation of particular activities toward particular objects. It foregrounds the development of competence and expertise as workers labor ... *Actor-network theory* provides a political and rhetorical view of networks and foregrounds the continual recruiting of new allies—both human and nonhuman—to strengthen the greater network that is comprised of these allies and relationships. (Spinuzzi, 2008, p. 16)

Spinuzzi's book examines internal corporate correspondences between departments of a telecommunications company through the lenses of both Actor-Network Theory and Activity Theory. ANT has a more organic perspective of network relationships, whereas Activity Theory views the networks as having more structure inherent within the activities themselves. When

considering the network of viewers and potential viewers surrounding a web series, frameworks that explain network activities as being conducted by joined but distinct individuals can be useful, as it reminds the content provider that their network is ever-changing. Such frameworks also suggest that networked members possess diverse expertise and knowledge within the network.

Says Spinuzzi, “two employees and the parts of the network in which they labor use very different tools, rules and techniques” (Spinuzzi, 2008, p. 14). In a broader sense, his observation overlaps with Pierre Bourdieu’s concept of habitus—positions within society serve distinct social functions and, therefore, each position requires forms of capital and possesses individual objectives and distinct techniques to achieve them. Bourdieu describes habitus as

systems of durable, transposable dispositions, structured structures predisposed to function as structuring structures, that is as principles of the generation and structuring of practices and representations that can be objectively “regulated” and “regular” without in any way the product of obedience to rules, objectively adapted to their goals without presupposing a conscious aiming at ends or an express mastery of the operations necessary to attain them, and being all this, collectively orchestrated without being the product of the orchestrating action of a conductor. (Bourdieu, 1977, p. 72)

In other words, habitus describes a direct correlation of a specified position within society and the disposition of a person attracted to that position (Bourdieu, 1993, p. 64). Activity Theory also says activities of network participants directly correlate to their relationships with each other and their function within the entire network. Each of these theories provides complementary lenses for observing the development of an online viewing network and the roles each viewer takes on within it (e.g. liking, commenting, sharing, creating content) and the ways in which the

content provider can assess viewer engagement through observing these activities and roles—much like a teacher observes the compositional activities of her students.

Challenges of Online Entertainment: Discoverability, Budgets and Changing Audiences

The difference between push and pull media is significant. Typically, online consumers have to be more motivated and engaged to view content. Earlier, I defined engagement as “the level to which a self-regulated or self-motivated viewer feels drawn to a particular cultural product, freely and voluntarily interacts with the content, and responds to it with a measurable, creative, or behavioral act” (p. 29). Even in the viewing act alone, there are more steps to pulling online content toward computers than toward television sets. In traditional broadcast television, all that is required of the viewer is to have an operable television set, switch it on, and select a channel to watch. With these activities alone, he can become a measurable member of an audience. However, as an audience member, he is restricted to decisions in scheduling and content made entirely by the broadcasting network.³⁰

In the traditional television model, network executives oversee teams of market researchers, programming and scheduling experts. These experts provide extensive research and utilize sophisticated and expensive audience-measurement tools. Their findings impact the networks’ decisions regarding programming, scheduling and other formatting logistics of current and future content pushed to viewers. In years past, avid television viewers’ schedules had to be customized to the television schedule. If they wanted to do something that conflicted with the airing of a favorite show, they had to decide which of the two activities they wanted more.

³⁰ Cable companies’ offering of *on demand* programs are more of a hybrid between pushed traditional broadcasts and pulled online content. Watching videos on demand after a show has been broadcast is a more recent phenomenon for cable television customers. It requires more steps to finding and pulling content toward the viewer than traditional broadcast, but online viewers still have to go through more steps to search for, find content and watch it on their computer devices.

Technologies began to shift “appointment-based” television viewing. Recording devices sparked a paradigm change as viewers could now set their video cassette recorders (VCR) to record favorite pushed shows on videotape while they were busy with other activities. Recording services such as TiVo took recording content to another level, offering even more power to the viewer to customize their viewing experience without losing any visual quality. When viewers consumed recorded television shows, often they elected to bypass the commercials, which was definitely something networks and advertising sponsors were not happy about. With the expansion of broadcasting service to include cable networks and media devices, viewers have the potential for a more diverse and customizable experience with television media than ever before (Rappaport, 2011, p.163).

Online, media content is not typically pushed toward a potential consumer until that person has already indicated in their previous searches the types of products, items or artifacts they are looking for. Adding to this complication, entertainment is not a life or death necessity, so it is far more difficult for a potential viewer to find a series if they do not know it exists. People have to search for and discover products they like. Online entertainment is discovered generally through social media (Twitter, Facebook, blogs) or via media curators such as Netflix and Hulu. In 2011, although posting content online was not difficult, being discovered often was. Offering entertainment online requires that members of the audience also possess different literacies and skill sets than that of traditional broadcast television if some of them wished to participate in active and creative roles.

An online-only entertainment company typically needs to attract sufficient viewership to continue production without four critical advantages in traditional broadcasting: (a) without a centralized broadcasting network that takes care of a lot of the business tasks; (b) without a

network that has an already established corporate personality and target audience; (c) without “pushed,” appointment-based (scheduled) content, which is easier for viewers to find than online and (d) without a sizable network marketing and promotion department. A small production team indeed faces challenges with minimal financial promotional backing if not for the good will of engaged audience members.

In traditional broadcast television, producers would not be able to make many of the suggested changes for a number of reasons. First, formatting parameters on networks (such as episode lengths) are typically in half-hour blocks with specific time blocks allotted for external commercial content. Second, the network has a right of refusal to air content they either feel is too controversial, objectionable, or is not in keeping with the quality, overall tone and corporate personality of the network. In the U.S., traditionally commercial television programs need to turn a substantial profit in order to satisfy a larger organization that has placed them on their channel or network. For that to occur there needs to be a way to pay for the show’s production, promotion and transmission. The exceptions are the Public Broadcasting System (PBS), which receives grants, government subsidies and personal donations to cover expenses, or in countries such as the United Kingdom, which requires license fees from viewers that are used to commission programming. Slots on American commercial broadcasting networks require large sums of money, generally split among several advertisers. It is possible to find productions that have been supported by one advertiser but, typically, that is not the model most broadcasters utilize these days. For multiple advertisers to be enticed to support entertainment programs there needs to be a potential public willing to watch these programs and ultimately purchase the products advertised during transmission. With a rhizomatic framework, an audience is never a fixed structure and is constantly measured as a fluctuating, fickle entity. In the U.S., this is

measured via ratings systems such as Nielsen (in 15-minute increments), focus groups, marketing data of advertisers and, more recently, analytics of online viewership, online sales, social media discussions and blogs.

The Internet's rhizomatic quality is distinct from traditional broadcasting as it allows a lot of space for more content to fan out from central artifacts. When creative, engaged viewers are able to generate, produce and post off-shooting series (spin-offs) of their own in response, and borrow from a social artifact's universe, there is a greater opportunity for others to trace back to the original content. Therefore, what might be perceived as advantages to posting content online might actually present more challenges. In a networked age, "audiences have audiences" (Littleton, 2014, para. 1). Content providers have begun to see that audience members can potentially take a more active role in the sharing of content and opinions online than they ever did in traditional broadcast television. When audience members are engaged and happy, this bodes well for content providers. However, when audience members are disaffected or even hostile to content, providing content could merely result in hemorrhaging expenses with no tangible return

Granted, posting content on the internet has advantages and this case study documents three phenomena that occurred during the production, posting and modification of this web series: (a) the ability for the producers to quickly modify content and formats of each episode; (b) the ability of viewers to respond more directly as changes were made to the series website and episode format; and (c) the fanning out of creative acts from this original entertainment web series.

Deeper human needs feed into the roles and habitus individual viewers are willing to assume. Members of a fan community (active or inactive) will either be motivated to respond

creatively to it or not. They will be motivated or perhaps persuaded to take on a marketing role of spreading the word about the program or not. Content providers who understand the relationship of their content to their viewers, as well as viewer responsive activities, might find a pedagogical framework useful in enhancing this relationship. Therefore, viewers who enjoy particular content can be persuaded to participate in a creative act related to it and spread the word within their social networks. Each of these challenges needs to be dealt with to sustain an audience large enough to financially sustain an entertainment series.

Theoretical Summary and Conceptual Framework

Having reviewed terms used in this dissertation, as well as related literature drawn from diverse related fields (communications, social sciences, psychology and education) and subfields (traditional television broadcasting, online entertainment, marketing, audience measurement, audience assessment, sentiment analysis, network theories, transactional distance and eLearning best practices), this Literature Review offers content providers much to consider when placing content online. Yet, it is useful to understand how audiences have traditionally been conceptualized, assessed and measured before understanding how the Internet has changed these concepts. One of the benefits of placing content online is that not only is the content now globally accessible, but often the Internet computer servers, where the content is posted provide accurate quantitative data collection and reporting as part of their service. User-generated quantitative data offer a good foundation for assessing audience numbers. However, as mentioned earlier, they do not answer the “why’s” of media consumption, nor do they show sentiment. For that reason, qualitative data streams are included as they better demonstrate these “why’s,” which are also explained through the field of psychology.

From social sciences, Pierre Bourdieu's discussion of the predisposition of individuals to positions within cultural production (habitus) offers a different perspective on the same behaviors. In fact, the core of my conceptual framework draws from Pierre Bourdieu: society is comprised of various fields (education and entertainment are just two of them). These fields are spaces of "possible forces" (Bourdieu, 1993, p. 64). Each field contains its own doxa, or beliefs that govern how interactions are carried out within themselves. Borrowing from LaTour, Hall, Spinuzzi, Deleuze and Guattari, each field can be conceptualized spatially, as an ever-shifting, expanding and changing network, populated by actors and actants who coordinate or articulate for a period of time, are engaged in performing activities (even passive ones). Once the purpose or rationale for these actors' connection is deemed complete (or the core of the network breaks down), the articulation breaks apart once more and individuals move either to other parts of the network, or to other networks completely, often creating other articulations and serving other purposes. Therefore, the network surrounding *Explosion Bus* should be considered a transitory entity. As long as the main hub of a network remains active and intact, there is potential for an active and intact community, regardless of what field it is in. What follows is a diagram of my conceptual framework (Fig.1), which borrows from these main theoretical backgrounds and informs my approach the data collection and analysis in this case study.

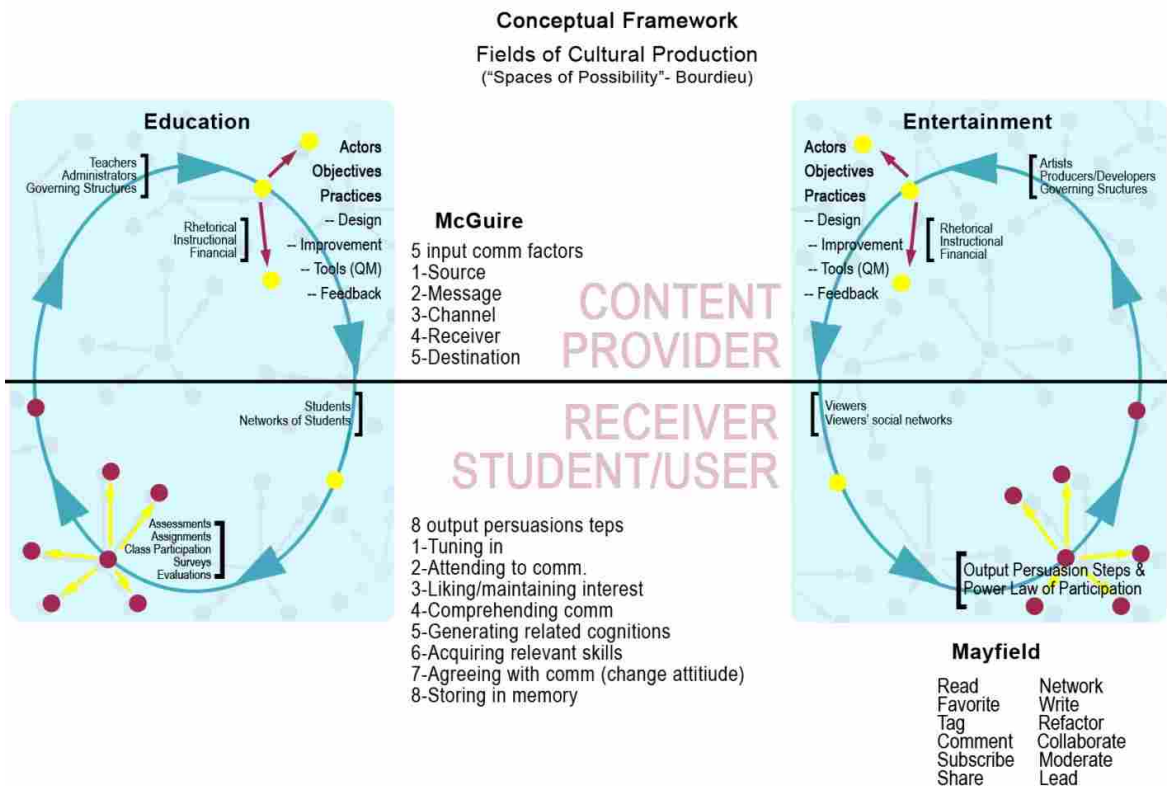


Fig. 1. Cyclical Conceptual Framework following network activities in each phase.

The actors in the field of education include teachers, instructional designers, administrators, students, sometimes relatives of students, greater governing structures such as accreditation institutions, the U.S. Department of Education (and other global governmental bodies), technologies useful for teaching and learning, and certain expressed objectives that need to be achieved. Education foregrounds feedback mechanisms (e.g. assessments, assignments, class participation, surveys, evaluations) by necessity, as teachers need to know if their objectives are being accomplished. Instructional design models such as ADDIE and Successive Approximation Model (SAM) offer teachers a framework for continued improvement of course design. ADDIE follows a cyclical process that assesses, develops, designs, implements and

evaluates content in ordered steps. SAM is similar, but operates in a more organic and less phasic process. The Quality Matters rubric fits within these instructional design approaches. When a course goes through the Quality Matters review process, suggestions are made to improve the course, and the suggestions are implemented and then shared with the students, who, in turn, provide signals as to whether (or sometimes they are directly asked) the changes made a positive difference in their course experience and learning.

The field of entertainment may not have the same actors, actants and objectives as education, but there are similarities to the basic components within each field. Teachers are replaced by content providers (artists, producers, developers); students are replaced with viewers (users); governing structures include the Federal Communications Commission and other global bodies governing the Internet; and, finally, learning objectives are replaced by the objectives or expectations of the content provider, or those who pay the content provider (for example, as we will soon see in Snyder's case, the objective of entertaining people and making a profit large enough to cover costs and sustain production). Using an English studies lens, content providers have rhetorical objectives to achieve (e.g. to persuade, to entertain, to create emotion, to instruct) through employing the five canons of rhetoric: invention, arrangement, style, delivery and, to a much lesser extent in this case study, memory. With online entertainment conceptualized as a space of activity and possibility, the cycle of content and responses flows in both directions to and from the content provider and the engaged viewer.

In either field, as McGuire's model delineates, the content provider makes decisions regarding the Five Input Communication Factors. She develops the content and shares it online. She can decide the source, message, channel, receiver and destination of the subject matter. In education, that is done by the teacher. The viewer discovers the content and, if so inclined

(engaged), will make a measurable response, either through just consuming the content (analytic data), or composing and posting his own creative responses. With McGuire's model, there is an array of general response types (see Fig. 1) that Mayfield makes more specific in his Power Law of Participation. These responses are then available for the producer to discover and assess as well as others in the users' social networks. On the Internet, all who see this content have, as Ross Mayfield calls it, "Permission to Participate" with their own responses (Mayfield, 2006, para. 4). This user-generated content can serve as feedback to the original artifact and the original content provider may choose to modify subsequent content she posts. This process is linear, traceable and can be ongoing.

As will become apparent in the next section where I operationalize these theoretical frameworks, I have chosen to develop a model of methodology that is chronological and cyclical and, therefore, phasic. Each phase begins with two measurable activities performed by the *Explosion Bus* team content providers: the ExplosionBus.com website is made available, with a certain design and navigational structure. Concurrent to the new look of the website, the team posts an episode of *Explosion Bus* following a format and design unique to that particular phase. The data for each phase demonstrate the overall nature of their work and their output in these two online spaces (YouTube and ExplosionBus.com) as well as the team's assumptions about their relationship to the audience.

In my conceptual framework, the top of each phase is marked by the initial posting of content. In education, that would be made by a teacher. In entertainment, it is whenever new content or information (promotion) is made available to the general public. In this case study, each phase begins with the initial online posting of each first episode that follows a particular format and design. This new content travels to receivers and viewers within its network and is

consumed in varying degrees, based on level of engagement. Some people will see a link to *Explosion Bus*, but not click on it (this is obviously not a measurable activity). Some will click on the link but close it within seconds. Others will stay attentive to the content for longer stretches of time. Others will finish the content and move on, or look for more content within the *Explosion Bus* channel or webpage. As William Brown notes, the tendency of audience models is that at each tier of engagement, there are fewer audience members than in the preceding lower tier (Brown, 2011, p. 23). As some viewers become engaged enough to create measurable responses (not just analytically, but in qualitative data streams), they become co-producers of new content which, in turn, flows out to members of their individual networks (the bottom of the cycle in my conceptual framework). This includes completing the cycle back to the original content provider, who now can utilize these creative responses in informing their assumptions, work and output for the next phase.

Data Analysis Overview: Operationalizing the Theoretical Models into Cyclical Phases

With scholarship covering such broad fields, I certainly have considered a lot of theoretical angles that apply to this *Explosion Bus* case study. So, how do I intend to operationalize all these theories in this project? What framework will be beneficial to online entertainment content providers?

Originally, I thought my methods would trace all creative activities within the *Explosion Bus* viewing network, including those of the content providers, using a compositional or rhetorical lens. However, a better approach to discuss these creative activities is to frame them from the point of view of how the content providers' perspective was being challenged, massaged, and changed by the feedback these activities revealed. Snyder and his team had

preconceived notions about what work was taking place within this viewing network, but as they saw the results via analytics, viewer responses, and input from members of the team (including myself as a media consultant), they realized changes needed to be made.

My initial analysis of the website and video format in chapter four grew out of my training in the Quality Matters rubric review process (discussed on p. 78), and the broader cyclical model of constant course improvement, ADDIE, used by many instructional designers in curriculum development (Clark, 2012, para. 1). These served as a means to guide the improvement process of *Explosion Bus*. As communicators utilize the rhetorical canon, ADDIE takes designers through the process of creating appropriate and useful curricula, with each step of the ADDIE process feeding into the next:

- *Assessment* answers “Who are the learners?” “What outcomes do we want them to learn?” “What theories will inform this situation?”
- *Design* answers “What objectives will achieve the desired outcomes?” “How can these outcomes be most effectively achieved?”
- *Development* takes the answers to the design questions and applies the theoretical framework to tangible, designed content or media.
- *Implementation*: The content and/or media is/are delivered to the learners.
- *Evaluation* answers the questions “Was the design and delivery successful? Can this design be improved? Should the curricula be reassessed or updated?”

These ideas inform the cyclical conceptual framework I have posed and are useful in both the educational and entertainment contexts. By suggesting to content providers that audiences are potentially able to achieve their objectives, and that the relationship online is more cyclical rather than “push,” this might improve the relationship between the two.

The analysis of the viewer responses comes from a conglomeration of engagement continua from McGuire, Napoli, Mayfield and Kinneavy as laid out in the diagram of my conceptual framework (see Fig.1). I selected these over educationally related continua such as several in the *Handbook of Research on Student Engagement* (Bangert, Ching Yang and Zaichkowsky's continua), as these seemed more directly related to an online entertainment context. For instance, Mayfield specifies possible types of involvement in a community gathered around an online cultural product (i.e., reading, favoriting, tagging, commenting, etc.). Viewer responses to *Explosion Bus* postings are coded by viewer activity, general overall expressed sentiment and degree of difficulty of that activity. Some sentiments also have subcodes that expose rhetorical intent (i.e. a neutral comment could actually be meant as a joke, or a negative comment could be an insult or “constructive criticism” because the viewer is positively engaged). Content providers should be aware of degrees of difficulty (overall time spent on the activity, skill set required and cognitive effort required to complete the activity) when assessing engagement of viewers.

These suggestions align with McGuire’s *Communication-Persuasion Matrix*, specifically within his list of *Input Communication Variables* in the control of the content-provider:

1. Source (number, unanimity, demographics, attractiveness, credibility, etc.)
2. Message (appeal, inclusion/omission, organization, style, repetitiveness, etc.)
3. Channel (modality, directness, context, etc.)
4. Receiver (demographics, ability, personality, lifestyle, etc.)
5. Destination (immediacy/delay, prevention/cessation, direct/immunization, etc.)

(McGuire, 2001, p. 32)

Once Snyder's team decided upon the design and format, content (the *Explosion Bus* web page and/or episodes), and delivery of the source artifact(s) (YouTube, Facebook and Twitter links, etc.), *Explosion Bus* viewers were enabled to view, copy, share, store and/or modify this content outside of the *Explosion Bus* team's control. Chapter four reviews the assumptions behind the original *Explosion Bus* content, the work done by Snyder's team and the changes made over five chronological phases of activities. Each phase starts with the posting of the first new episode of *Explosion Bus*. Phase Zero is thus named because it pre-dates the first episodes:

- Phase Zero (From first posting to the *Explosion Bus* YouTube account July 10, 2011-Sept 11, 2011)
- Phase One (Sept 12, 2011-March 10, 2012)
- Phase Two (March 11, 2012-September 17, 2012)
- Phase Three (September 18, 2012-March 12, 2013)
- Phase Four (March 13, 2013-March 30, 2014)

Chapter four also includes an overview and measurement of viewer responses during each of these phases, an evaluation of the educational standards that applied more aptly to the entertainment (commercial media) context, and a determination whether these educational standards seemed to have impacted viewer responses. It also tallies these activities into coded categories within the YouTube *Explosion Bus* channel network. Viewer activities are comprised of quantitative data such as views, likes, dislikes, shares, subscribers and number of comments, as well as qualitative data such as comments and viewer-generated videos (including auditions and spin-off series), before and after the changes were implemented. The coded data assess whether the changes improved audience response. This response will be measured by scoring

whether the viewers participated at a higher level of creative activities before and after the changes had been made to the videos and webpage.

Chapter four also shows how the work and demands of online engagement were modified in the minds of the content providers. Based on the content providers' intellectual understanding and commitment to their understanding of engagement, what was "the work" of the online content provider during each phase? As each phase progresses and manifests different audience responses, lessons learned at the end of each active phase are also included. By the end of Phase Three, the *Explosion Bus* team decided the audience was not large enough to sustain further production. However, Snyder and Covett decided to subsequently produce a shorter, simpler web series, *Homo Erectus* (without Katz or Leopold), where the team could, from the start, apply what they had learned during the other phases of *Explosion Bus*. This new series comprises the last phase, Phase Four, and includes *Explosion Bus* team activities on the *Explosion Bus* channel following the "cancelation" of *Explosion Bus* and the viewer activities surrounding this second web series posted from October 22, 2013-March 30, 2014.

Online activities and transitory articulations of individuals can be traced across time via analytics and qualitative repositories such as discussion forums or webpage comments sections. Conversations emerge through these Internet technologies. My conceptual framework follows these conversations with a cyclical and phasic lens. Each phase begins with the online posting of what was under the control of the content provider (*Explosion Bus* creative team), and then what was under the control of the viewer in response via both analytic and qualitative data. Chapter four follows five cycles or phases of these activities as they flow out from the content provider, to the viewer, and back again. Data in the control of the content provider includes

1. The original activities, designs and formatting decisions of the *Explosion Bus* team

2. The formatting changes they chose to make (based on educational standards) at two points during phases 1-3 when the *Explosion Bus* channel was most active
3. The additional information gathered through personal email correspondence and separate interviews with Tom Snyder and another with his producer, Katie Covett, which reflect changes in audience conceptualization and the “work” of the content provider.

The original formats, and the original "work" Snyder and his team were engaged in, were based primarily on the ways Snyder had worked in traditional broadcast television. This initial conceptualization no doubt assumed a more passive role of audience members. Therefore the qualitative analysis of Phase One is a review of these original designs and formats following a process similar to that of a Quality Matters rubric course review, although adapting QM standard specifics for entertainment, and in some cases omitting them.

I examine the activities and responses that were posted online and under the control of the viewer/media consumer within the *Explosion Bus* viewing community. The responses of individuals within the viewing network become part of the assessment process that feeds back to the content provider, which ends that particular phase. In this case study, each response to the content changes serve informative (or referential), expressive, persuasive and literary roles within the *Explosion Bus* network of viewers (Kinneavy, 1980, p 302). This feedback loop informs the *Explosion Bus* team’s audience conceptualization as well as future practices.

The data under the control of the viewer is gathered from analytics, comments and user-generated videos posted on the *Explosion Bus* channel. As in several of the theoretical models listed in the Literature Review (McGuire, Mayfield, Napoli), these viewer activities are tied to varying levels of engagement based upon degrees of difficulty, time and cognitive skill sets

required to create these responses. These measurable responses, as with my original analysis of Snyder's team's activities in Phase One, led me to see an obvious correlation between the fields of entertainment and education: Education has objectives it wants to achieve, and teachers are guided by students' responses to inform them if these objectives have been achieved. Snyder's team had objectives and expectations it wanted to achieve and they also could be guided by viewer responses to inform them whether these expectations had been achieved. Seeing this connection between the two fields informed applying the QM rubric to this entertainment context. As Snyder's team agreed to make changes, it was logical to compare viewer responses from a former phase to those of a subsequent phase after the changes were implemented. Therefore, my data collection and analyses have been divided into chronological phases measuring viewer activities both before and after changes were made. Utilizing this framework, the next chapter goes into the details regarding the cyclical methods employed to answer my research questions.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

This chapter provides more in-depth details concerning the methodology of this case study, the cyclical approach to data collection and analysis and challenges and historical issues of online audiences and assessment.

INTRODUCTION

Initially, my methods were going to focus on the application of best eLearning practices to improve engagement of *Explosion Bus* viewers and to measure the “success” of applying these eLearning practices simply by measuring the quantitative data supplied by online analytics. As modifications were made to the *Explosion Bus* web pages and format of the videos, I originally thought that merely measuring numbers of website visitors and video viewers would be sufficient to imply these modifications were successful. However, as I learned more about audience measurement systems and the nature and limitations of analytics (p. 55), I quickly learned what the audience measurement industry already knew: no longer are quantitative data sufficient for content providers to understand their audiences as there are too many ways the data can be manipulated or artificially inflated. Whereas quantitative data can be symptomatic of audience interest and, to some degree, exposure, audience measurement systems must include and indeed foreground qualitative data streams to best understand how “successfully” their content is reaching and cultivating an engaged audience.

There are many qualitative data streams that can be triangulated with quantitative data to provide a more accurate picture than can analytics. These streams are more complicated to analyze as quantitative data can better express engagement, intensity, and/or the particular aspects that draw viewers to cultural products. Having decided to include qualitative data,

questions I needed to answer were the following: (a) What would be the unit of measurement? (b) Which data stream(s) would be examined? and (c) How would engagement levels be quantified? *Explosion Bus* had a presence not only on YouTube and on its own web page, but had accounts on Twitter and Facebook. I chose not to include Facebook activities as it was a closed group and would have caused issues with confidentiality and delays with the Old Dominion University Instructional Review Board. I do have the data of Explosion Bus' Twitter account and Twitter follower responses. However, although they are regarded as public information, I decided that the information from the *Explosion Bus* web Page at ExplosionBus.com and the *Explosion Bus* YouTube channel was sufficient for providing the best and most direct answers to my research questions. This was primarily because I made no suggestions regarding their approach to Twitter, Facebook or other social media conversations. Suggestions were only made regarding the formatting and design of the original content.

WHY WAS THIS ARTIFACT SELECTED?

As I was familiar with *Explosion Bus* within a week of its first appearance online, and because I was able to impact some design and formatting choices made in subsequent versions, I was in a good position to use this as a case study and develop a framework to offer to other content providers. Familiarity with the Explosion Bus team's former productions also put me in a unique position to be understand "inside jokes" or references to past work. I selected items from the QM rubric because of my training experience with it, and because I found it a viable means to encourage engagement. My having been first exposed to *Explosion Bus* as a fan could create assumptions of personal bias. However, my research methods only include the measurable activities of the Explosion Bus team and their viewing audience. It includes my instructional design input, but it does not include any of my own responses as part of the analysis.

I wanted to examine publicly accessible responses instead of contact viewers via a survey or something similar, as the model I want to show content providers assumes they would not be inclined to contact viewers directly. I also did not want to influence any subsequent viewer activity. I was concerned that if viewers were aware someone was studying their activities, it might dissuade them or encourage them unduly. I didn't wish to change anyone's natural behavior. Using data from YouTube offers viewers multiple means of measuring interest levels (i.e. numbers of views, likes/dislikes, shares, subscribers, annotation clicks, comments and, of course, a place other video producers can post their own videos related to the show). I am only looking at measurable compositional activities and not the demographic makeup of viewers who create them. I am also not analyzing unmeasurable viewers—those “lurkers” who do not create measurable responses, outside of clicking on the initial video link.

Why a Case Study?

The goal of this dissertation is to describe a unique, individual context that includes evaluations that have broader implications. As the focus of analysis will be more on the activities of the content provider, who is observing responses to their original content, a descriptive approach to this case study is the best way to conduct this research. In *Applications of Case Study Research* (2012), Robert K. Yin cites four types of case studies and what type of question each type answers. If the aim of the case study is to portray what happened in a particular case, this is likely to be a *descriptive* case study (Part II). I chose this approach since I was able to impact changes based on my background in instructional design and I want to assess whether my input was useful. The components of this situation therefore lend themselves best to a unique, descriptive case study.

Historical Issues of Audience Measurement and Rhizomatic Uncertainties

My interest in analyzing how networks fan out from central artifacts comes from Liza Potts, who observed conversations in the context of social media during natural disasters and crises events (2008). This case study looks at how the responses from a central artifact also circulate back to the content provider and others in a viewing network. This approach stems also from Latour's five uncertainties within Actor Network Theory (ANT), understanding that social activity is rife with components that cannot be pinned down or neatly categorized in a research project (both Latour and Spinuzzi call ANT "messy"). Latour's five uncertainties result from the shifting nature of groups, actions, objects and facts within networks. These uncertainties then create a fifth uncertainty in the very act of documenting actor-network interactions. Latour says, "The first source of uncertainty one should learn from is that there is no relevant group that can be said to make up social aggregates, no established component that can be sued as an incontrovertible starting point" (LaTour, 2009, p. 29). Demographic measurements therefore should not be foregrounded, but rather choices made by individual humans.

Latour goes on to say that ANT frees the researcher "of being constantly bogged down in the impossible task of deciding once and for all what is the right unit of analysis sociology should choose to focus on" (Latour, 2009, p. 34). This makes research a more organic process where, in one instance, one could be examining a user's comment and, in another, a video or blog. In ANT, the varied components of a network are identified and whatever takes place within those tenuous, temporal connections is traced without focusing on the mere categorization of these components (producers, users, comments, user-generated videos). Again, my research will not examine audience activities within social or categorized groups, but rather as activities of

individual members within the *Explosion Bus* network of its own viewers, including the content provider, across time.

Stephen Rappaport, knowledge solutions director at the Advertising Research Foundation (ARF) talks about current commercial methods of audience measurement. In *Listen First!* Rappaport maintains that audience measurement in online entertainment can be problematic because of the rhizomatic nature of the Internet. Bob Barroci, ARF president, agrees citing the following specific challenges “no budget, nobody in charge; where is the statistical rigor; is it projectable, tough organizational issues; hard to sell internally; ROI difficult to determine; legal has major issues” (Rappaport, 2001, p. ix). Plus there are issues with the larger overall viewership since each individual production (video) has a smaller audience due to the larger number of content, networks and content providers. This means that collecting data online outside of a large organization is possible and could reveal accurate conclusions. Given that the viewership can be smaller, this approach should be manageable for one or two people to collect and analyze information.

In the past, audience measurement data (collected via “diaries, surveys, set-top boxes, or metered samples ... guided marketers to choose shows where their products’ advertising should be placed” (Rappaport, 2001, p. 164). Now, “[s]ocial TV ratings have started hinting that the way people bring the programs into their lives differs from their general popularity as measured by conventional ratings” (p. 165). As Rappaport says, “Conversations about TV act as social lubricants” (p. 164) and new data streams include “official show sites, fan pages, unofficial fan sites, specialized blogs and forums, and social networks” (p. 165). “Companies measure the strength of the bond between viewers and programs by factoring in sentiment, affinity and intention to stick with the program” (p. 165). They do this through “listening,” which is defined

as “The study of naturally occurring conversations, behaviors, and signals that may or may not be guided, that brings the voice of people’s lives into the brand” (Rappaport, 2001, p. 1). Says Rappaport, “Listening is about learning through time and engaging with a like-minded community” (2001, p. xiii). The concepts of “listening” and observing “through time” are central to the methodology of this project, as changes in the multiple data streams mentioned above are noted and measured across the five phases when the *Explosion Bus* YouTube channel was active. This study counts the number of incidents of quantitative activities and codes qualitative activities into the standard positive, neutral and negative categories of sentiment analysis. Each of these categories are subcoded into subgroups demonstrating a stronger sentiment. The subgroups are explained in the coding section on page 129 in this chapter.

With each activity, viewers participate in the overall microcosm of the cultural production field and exhibit their disposition toward a particular position within the *Explosion Bus* viewing network. Bourdieu explains that a disposition, or habitus, begins with the position itself.

A position as it appears to the (more or less adequate) “sense of investment” which each agent applies to it presents itself either as a sort of necessary locus which beckons those who are made for it (“vocation”) or, by contrast, as an impossible destination, an unacceptable destiny or one that is acceptable only as temporary refuge or a secondary, accessory position, This sense of social direction which orients agents, according to their modesty or daring, their disinterestedness or thirst for profit, towards the risky, long-term investments of journalism, serials or the theatre, is the basis of the astonishingly close correspondence that is found between positions and dispositions. (1992, p. 64)

So, some viewers are drawn to make comments, some to share a video link, some to become co-creators. Jason Mittell points out that “For dedicated fans, watching a program is only the beginning of their involvement with the show” (2010, p. 374). Often, the more engaged viewers move into creating routines around the act of watching the show, “ranging from solitary immersions into the text to social celebrations experienced as part of a broader community” (2010, p. 374). Before analog and digital technology caught up to the fans’ desire to continue engagement with content, dedicated fans would take it upon themselves to create (in many instances illegally) images or recordings of their favorite shows—by taking static or moving pictures of the television screen with consumer-grade cameras, recording the sound from the television speaker, or even creating homemade pieces of art or clothing that replicated or borrowed designs from the shows. Fans, in turn, often shared these artifacts with other fans both in casual and more structured settings (fan conventions). With the arrival of the VCR, digital media and the Internet, it became easier for fans to collect and share content. Jason Mittell states, “Fans incorporate elements of favored texts into all spheres of their everyday lives” (2010, p. 374) as “fandom is a social practice for most fans” (2010, p. 374). Therefore I am looking for evidence of these types of engagement within these data streams in the hope of assembling a picture of how more engaged fans responded to content.

Henry Jenkins asserts producers (content providers) can cultivate their fan communities (audiences) through two approaches: firstly, by sitting back and observing “natural” and unstructured, fan-to-fan sharing of content and, secondly, by systematically rolling out promotional content to different tiers of viewers, based on their particular levels of engagement (Jenkins, 2013, pp. 147-148). A third approach employs a combination of the first two. The *Explosion Bus* team created Twitter and Facebook accounts that announced their new episodes.

These announcements were posted via the creators' Facebook accounts (Katie Covett, Jonathan Katz, Tom Leopold), and later via a Facebook page, dedicated exclusively for *Explosion Bus* content, as well as a fake account for the *Explosion Bus* character, Jon Gold. Obviously, if viewers are already "friends" of the creators, they are probably already at a higher level of engagement, as people are not likely to seek out and "friend" content providers they are not interested in. With these concepts in mind, the next section explains the steps of my methodology.

METHODS

This project primarily looks at three versions of the *Explosion Bus* webpage (see Appendix A) across three active phases: (a) the original version from September 2011, created before I was involved; (b) a second version rolled out in March 2012, where some of my input was implemented and (c) the most recent version of the *Explosion Bus* videos and webpage, released on September 18, 2012, which employed more changes. I am also including two additional phases of YouTube videos: Phase Zero, before the first phase was posted, and Phase Four, after *Explosion Bus* had ended. These other phases are included to illustrate how people responded to the promotional videos without any episodes, and how the *Explosion Bus* team applied what they had learned for a subsequent video project.

Fortunately, while season one was still in its first run, I had the foresight to save screen grabs, transcripts of most of the synchronous chats and copies of the original episodes, and to obtain a month of early analytics for the show and website. These sources allow me to compare before and after versions of the website and episode content and include the results with other sources of data in this case study.

Reworking and comparing the content of the *Explosion Bus* website and episodes using eLearning practices is part of my qualitative analysis of Phase One. The changes I suggested were based on my own background of Quality Matters rubric and instructional design training. However, the specific nature of the changes is primarily to be used as markers of before/after versions of formatting and content. I am measuring whether the format and design changes had any effect on audience engagement by examining user-generated activities and responses of audience members surrounding the original *Explosion Bus* artifacts. Data from Phase Zero and Phase Four is included for further comparison purposes.

In traditional broadcast television, producers would not be able to employ many of these suggested changes, as episode lengths for television comedies are typically in half-hour blocks with nearly a third of the half-hour allotted for commercials. The Internet's rhizomatic characteristics leave enough space to create additional, related content around central artifacts. This means there is room for creative, engaged viewers to comment, share and even create a video series (spin-offs) related to and around the *Explosion Bus* world. The next analysis comes from examining changes in audience activities partially in response to the implemented changes to the website and episode formats. These activities are followed across five phases and include the phenomenon of viewer creators producing their own content (sometimes in greater amounts than *Explosion Bus* producers). There is an examination of social and user-generated creative activity in the form of web spin-off series, Youtube visits, likes and comments. The qualitative streams such as comments and videos are examined and coded manually.

Although the *Explosion Bus* viewership was not in the hundreds of thousands, over time it did improve. It is possible that implementing instructional design changes did play a part in impacting engagement favorably and that conceptualizing the audience as students may have

helped the content providers realize this cyclical relationship more efficiently. An analysis of each piece of original *Explosion Bus* content (each video) should also be considered as playing a role in generating interest—not just the episode format, but other components such as the subject matter, episode titles and promotional thumbnail graphics depicting the episode’s content. The next section covers my initial discovery of *Explosion Bus* and my immediate analysis of it borrowing from my training in an instructional design review process.

EARLY INVOLVEMENT AND QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS BORROWING FROM AN EDUCATIONAL RUBRIC

From the initial discovery of *Explosion Bus* early in Phase One, through the seven-week run of the “first season,” I realized I was already thinking about *Explosion Bus* and Snyder’s objectives as if he were a teacher offering an online course (ironically, Snyder had actually been a teacher early in his career). He, as a content provider, had an objective he wanted from his audience (namely an interest in the content, which could lead to telling others about it and lead to its being financially self-sustaining), much in the same way teachers have specific objectives for their students. Another similarity of online teaching and traditional broadcasting is that content providers are typically paid through the budgets of large institutions that deem content worthy enough to be offered, sometimes even if it is not financially viable. Just as advertisers pay for broadcast content regardless of whether many people watch, educational institutions pay for the salaries and infrastructure of courses.

One major difference between these contexts is that Snyder was not offered automatic remuneration for his content. He was initially hoping that compensation would be made through a sufficient number of viewers plus online advertising on YouTube (banner ads, etc.) and sales of a compilation DVD of the first season. However, Snyder turned off the financing component

(advertisements) in YouTube, as the team first wanted to attract viewers and not annoy them with advertisements. In my interview with Katie Covett (Cooke & Covett, 2016), she says they were concerned advertisements would be a barrier to new viewers. The hope was to reinstate the advertisements later once they had a bigger audience.

The next section provides an overview of the Quality Matters rubric standards, followed by *Explosion Bus*' webpage and episode formats across Phases One through Three and six-month phases between September 2011 and March 2013. Covering the QM overview first will help the reader recognize more quickly where *Explosion Bus* might not have met educational standards, had the series been an educational course.

QUALITY MATTERS RUBRIC OVERVIEW

Used by many institutions of higher learning to help standardize the quality of online courses, the Quality Matters rubric is a checklist to guide instructors on eLearning best practices. The rubric is comprised of forty (three)¹ individual course standards, which are grouped into eight general areas. These areas as I was trained in them were:

1. **Course Overview and Introduction:** Clarity of overall navigation, purpose, user expectations, content provider information, etc.

¹ I was using the 2005/6 Quality Matters rubric. For many years, the URL <https://www.qualitymatters.org/rubric> listed their standards online, but this has since been taken down. Iowa State University has a more recent listing at the following URL: http://www.elo.iastate.edu/files/2014/03/Quality_Matters_Rubric.pdf. They list the following standard areas in a later version of the rubric:

1. Course Overview and Introduction
2. Learning Objectives (Competencies)
3. Assessment and Measurement
4. Instructional Materials
5. Course Activities and Learner Interaction
6. Course Technology
7. Learner Support
8. Accessibility and Usability

This information is currently publicly available on the QM Quality Matters YouTube channel: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yQm_WbRxOGU. Posted 13 April 2016. Retrieved 8 April 2017.

2. **Learning Objectives:** Declaration of expected objectives, competencies and outcomes; instructions are appropriate for the student/viewer level.
3. **Assessments and Measurement:** What is measured is consistent with the objectives.
4. **Resources and Materials:** Instructional materials and requirements are cited, clear and consistent with the objectives.
5. **Learner Engagement:** Learner activities are consistent with the objectives and that a three-tiered approach to interaction is offered: instructor-student, content-student, student-student. Standards for teacher responsiveness are also included.
6. **Course Technology:** The teacher guides the student to appropriate tools and media support to assist the student in being able to access and engage with the content. Students are often offered links to these technologies.
7. **Learner Support:** Alternative support is offered to the students in case they have any problems with the technologies or in the logistics of accomplishing the objectives.
8. **Accessibility:** Americans with Disabilities Act standards have been met and alternative delivery materials have been offered for all user/student abilities.

Each of these areas is very important in an eLearning context since students pay a lot of money to educational institutions to receive a high level of education that is supposed to prepare them for their careers in the real world. However, as my review was not intended to imply or follow an officially QM-approved protocol, nor was it using the rubric in the context for which it had been developed, some of these eight general areas (e.g. supplementary learner support or assurance of accessibility), are not quite as necessary in an entertainment context and were

therefore not considered. By this I do not wish to imply that it is not important for content providers to offer alternative delivery methods based on user abilities (closed captioning for the hearing impaired, audio explanations of visuals or alternative languages for non-English speakers). Rather, as of this writing, YouTube entertainment is not mandated to offer alternative delivery options for all viewer abilities. Accessibility is still a voluntary option in entertainment, and the onus for ensuring all potential viewers have the needed technologies or proficiency to consume content is on the viewer, not the content provider. With this overview in mind, the next section turns to the Data Collection and units of measurement chosen to answer my research questions.

DATA COLLECTION

Timeline

As stated, I answer my research questions following a cyclical framework (Fig. 1) following before and after comparisons of content provider decision and audience responses. The cycles follow the flow of content from the providers to the viewers and back to the providers. Each phase begins with the posting of a YouTube video that incorporates a new format and web design, some of which are based on my suggestions, primarily at two points when the most dramatic changes based on eLearning practices were made. The viewer activities during these subsequent phases are then compared to those from Phase One. The study examines all videos posted by the *Explosion Bus* team, and not just the *Explosion Bus* web series. The phases are as follows:

Phase Zero: The team first opened the *Explosion Bus* YouTube channel on February 12, 2011, but did not post any content until July 10, 2011. I include this phase only to include the work that the team was doing in support of the *Explosion Bus* show. Phase Zero spans July 10

through September 2011, and includes promotional videos as well as introductions to cast members.

Phase One runs from September 12, 2011 to March 10, 2012. It includes the initial seven long-form episodes in their original format, posted simultaneously with the original *Explosion Bus* website (Appendix A). Subsequently, once I had made contact with the team and offered suggestions to them in December 2011, they began posting shorter clips and audition videos until they had finished changing the format of the new episodes.

Phase Two begins the day the newly formatted episodes and new website designs (see Appendix A) were posted, March 11, 2012, and ends on September 11, 2012. This phase was the busiest period—the *Explosion Bus* team posted not only 21 shorter episodes and began soliciting user-generated web auditions to be incorporated into the beginning of the new episodes. It also included several additional, related comedy series posted on the channel—a spin-off series called *Talent Scouts*, a live-action series of Tom Snyder lectures on advanced writing and another animated *Explosion Bus* “prequel” series with Katz and Leopold called *Teacher’s Lounge*. These changes were based on online practices I borrowed from my instructional design training and were first applied to the episodes during this phase, now branded as the *Explosion Bus* “Origin Story.” Since Phase Two episodes had been extracted from the content of the longer episodes from Phase One, the original, longer episodes were hidden from the YouTube channel and no longer available after Phase Two began. This phase also included a few instructional videos on how to audition for *Explosion Bus* and how to upload the audition videos.

During Phase Two, Snyder reconceived his work and that of the audience, and he invited more viewer participation in the form of audition videos, which viewers voluntarily created and submitted. During this phase there was a cyclical, digital conversation emerging between the

content providers (and all of their activities) and viewers/consumers (and all of their activities). The phenomenon of viewer creators who produced and shared their own content (sometimes in greater amounts than the *Explosion Bus* producers) has not been seen in traditional broadcast television to the degree that it is online, mainly because there is little to no room for it. Axel Brun calls this phenomenon “produsage” and Henry Jenkins has written extensively about “participatory culture.”

The concept of power is not foregrounded in my analysis, as Snyder is not *mandating* any creative activity. During this phase, viewers voluntarily posted “audition” videos of themselves on YouTube. *Explosion Bus* linked their current episode to two of the audition tapes for that week, and viewers were requested to watch them. Whichever video had the most views was then featured in the next episode of *Explosion Bus*. A view was regarded as a “vote.” Ultimately, the *Explosion Bus* team abandoned the audition videos in the final months of the show, but why they might have done that will be discussed in chapter five.

Phase Three incorporates further changes in the webpage (Appendix A) and episode formats, this time not only based on educational practices, but some additional strategies the *Explosion Bus* team wanted to blend with them as well. September 17, 2012 marked when the first “Season One” episode (as it was branded) was posted. There were four *Explosion Bus* spin-off series during Phase Three as well as more user-generated web auditions and another Katz/Leopold subseries with puppets called “Average Americans.” There were a few additional instructional videos posted to inform viewers of modifications to the viewer participation process. During this phase, instead of soliciting viewer audition videos that would be later included in the episodes, the *Explosion Bus* team offered instead to include animated versions of

viewers as background “extras,” as well as place scenes in locations suggested by the audience. This phase ends on March 12, 2013, when Snyder decided to end the *Explosion Bus* experiment.

Phase Four began on March 12, 2013 and ran through March 30, 2014. This follows the last episodes of the spin-off series and a short video of Tom Snyder at the end of episode 12, “*The Joke-off*,” (2013), saying good-bye to *Explosion Bus* (“That Chapter is Over”), and announcing the arrival of the team’s new series, *Homo Erectus*. Phase Four follows this series and is included because it depicts how Snyder and Covett adapted what they learned from *Explosion Bus* and applied it to a new project. The team also posted four long interviews of third-party podcasts that featured interviews with Snyder and Katz. The team also posted a 2 1/2-hour collection of all the “Origin Story” audio into one file.

These phases cover the microcosm of *Explosion Bus* network activities when all new content was posted, when modifications were made and when viewer responses could be measured. This timeline is sufficient to gauge a before/after or cause and effect measurement when instructional design changes were made to the formats of the show and official web page. This timeline also includes the official end of the *Explosion Bus* series, as well as a couple more recent dates of data collection to see whether anything had changed or impacted the *Explosion Bus* viewership. There is evidence there was. Since the number of responses was not exactly “viral,” this timeline also gives a lone researcher a manageable amount of content to deal with.

Data Streams and Collation

The focus of this research is to ascertain whether the number of activities and roles of viewers was impacted once changes had been made to the *Explosion Bus* website and individual shows based on educational practices. For this reason, the data units will be in the form of several publicly available and accessible data streams triangulated with the analytics for the

Explosion Bus YouTube channel and separate webpage. The streams can be categorized as five types:

1. Original, official content created by the *Explosion Bus* team
2. Analytic data from viewer activities
3. Qualitative, user-generated content (“produsage”), responding to type one.
4. Synchronous chats between creators and viewers fans
5. Direct interactions with the *Explosion Bus* team—specifically creator/writer/director, Tom Snyder, and producer, Katie Covett

The engagement data streams that fall under each type (numbered above) are listed below:

1. The official *Explosion Bus* website design [1]
2. The official *Explosion Bus* website analytic data [2]
3. The official *Explosion Bus* episodes [1]
4. Other videos produced by *Explosion Bus* creators [1] (promotional videos, instructional videos, “Teacher’s Lounge,” “Average Americans,” Tom Snyder, behind the scenes)
5. *Explosion Bus* YouTube Channel Analytics [2]
6. YouTube views [2]
7. Percentages of duration of videos viewed [2]
8. YouTube shares [2]
9. YouTube annotation clicks [2]
10. YouTube likes/dislikes [2]
11. YouTube subscribers [2]
12. YouTube comments [3]

13. *Explosion Bus*-related, user-generated videos [3] (audition tapes)
14. *Explosion Bus*-related, user-generated series [3] (*Talent Scouts*, *Hippy Girl Recaps*, *Explosion Bus Lifestyle*, and *Crazy Katz Lady*)
15. *The Pitch Show*—by the *Talent Scouts*
16. Transcripts from some of Phase One Tuesday night chats [4]
17. Correspondences and interview with Tom Snyder [5]
18. Correspondences and interview with Katie Covett [5]

With the exception of the chat transcripts and direct correspondences with the creators (16, 17 and 18), the data from the other streams are gathered and collated into an Excel spreadsheet. The qualitative data (comments and videos) are coded into categories of increasing engagement. The total number of each activity is then tallied and placed in a table for easy, at a glance comparison (see Appendix C).

Omitted Data Streams

The above data come from the overall output of the *Explosion Bus* network, which includes the content providers and viewers. The qualitative data are publically available and easy to include in a dissertation since this data is non-exempt and can be cited without any privacy or ownership rights infringements. For this reason, I am not including any data streams from Facebook (which required actively friending members of the *Explosion Bus* team or cast, or the official *Explosion Bus* Facebook page), nor am I including any non-*Explosion Bus* team participant comments from the synchronous chats.

Although the chats were not hidden behind any subscriptions or memberships, nor did they require an email address to participate, they did require that users click on the chat to open it and furnish a name (not necessarily a real one) for their posts to be distinguished from other

participants. I am including basic topics of discussion (mainly to cite my input) but, again, no one outside of Snyder or Covett are cited from the chats. Examining the original content and subsequent responses in a cyclical, chronological timeline helps to explain causes and effects in the creative activities of both the *Explosion Bus* team and the viewing groups.

The Google Analytics for both the *Explosion Bus* YouTube channel and for ExplosionBus.com provided a lot of quantitative data. However, once I was given access to this data, I found gaps in both analytic streams. During the time the *Explosion Bus* channel was most active, the content for their webpage had been moved from one server to another at one point and the webmaster at the time had not enabled the webpage data from September 20, 2012 to January 20, 2013. Therefore, viewing data for the webpage during that time period was not possible. I had not had direct access to the analytic data until well after the 18-month timeline of active *Explosion Bus* activity. This means that although four months of Phase Two webpage data are lost, the data from the YouTube channel are still intact during that time. The data for the latter part of Phase Two through the rest of the timeline are available and do indicate what Snyder and Covett said they had noticed: after a while, viewers were simply not going to the webpage. I have a suspicion as to why this was the case, but that will be covered in my Phase Three analysis in chapter five.

DATA ANALYSIS

Procedures

The first analysis of the *Explosion Bus* activities begins with my assessment of the formatting and design of the individual *Explosion Bus* episodes and webpage, with an educational framework in mind. Once my suggestions had been submitted to the *Explosion Bus* team (November 16, 2011 and January 8, 2012), and some of the suggestions implemented, the

second pass of analysis incorporates reviewing the *Explosion Bus* YouTube channel qualitative and quantitative data during each phase, noting when the implemented changes were first posted and noting viewer activities for the rest of the phase. This second phase follows the following procedures:

Once data collection was completed and collated into Excel spreadsheets, I divided and grouped all channel activities into the five chronological phases, starting with the first video posted on the *Explosion Bus* YouTube channel. I then examined the data for each of the 18 engagement categories (pp.117-118), starting with the analytics from YouTube and ExplosionBus.com. I then determined the sentiments for all *Explosion Bus* YouTube channel comments, including the spin-off series and shorter, non-episode video posts from the *Explosion Bus* team. I first coded the comments into positive, neutral and negative sentiments, then re-examined the intensity of the remarks. If certain remarks expressed a sentiment of particular intensity, I then recategorized comments with subcodes I constructed, based on the types of intensities I was seeing: IntensPos, Plot Idea (viewer offering suggestions for other episodes), Joke, Query, U (understanding), CC (constructive criticism), and Troll (explained on page 131). I then tallied the number of all activities into the Overall Results table (Appendix H). Next, I looked for patterns and trends within each phase. I followed the flow from the content provider to the audience, then back again at the start of each subsequent phase.

Viewer engagement was assessed by counting the incidents of qualitative and quantitative data at each level of engagement: numbers of views, comments, fan-generated videos, etc. Audience numbers from webpage analytics were also compared within this time period as well as email and Skype interactions I personally had with *Explosion Bus* personnel. Once all the *Explosion Bus* data (pp. 117-118) were compiled into one timeline in an Excel

spreadsheet, responses were categorized and coded by activity, general overall sentiment (rhetorical intention) and degree of difficulty. For instance, two viewers created two related web series around the *Explosion Bus* universe. This activity is assessed to be at a higher level than someone who only watched the video, or might have logged into YouTube to “like” the video. The ratios of these responses are what content providers can use to assess audience engagement.

Each listing in the timeline includes several attributes: (a) the type of content (subscriber, written comment, user-generated video, etc.); (b) if it is producer or user-generated, the overall nature/sentiment/tone of the content (positive, neutral, negative); (c) a suggested scale for levels of engagement associated with each type of activity (“like/dislike,” sharing a video, commenting briefly, creating a video in response), (d) the date the item was posted; (e) coding for sentiment subgroups and (f) associating the activity within a the continuum of engagement levels. Once each of the artifacts was coded, a comparison of these activities and roles within each phase were then compared to overall fluctuations and percentages of these roles in other phases of the case study. The qualitative data was triangulated with the quantitative data from YouTube’s analytics. This follows a similar approach used by Ibrahim Yucel (2011) where he coded different blog comments, and the intensity of comments was “identified by a quantitative analysis between the codes and responses and percentage of comments devoted to the comment” (Yucel, 2011, p. 57).

In his case study, he took

the number of replies the comment received and the percentage of all the comments on a topic that were replies to the comment. This thread percentage value indicates how capable a comment was in controlling the conversation and is referred to as loudness ... Loudness ... is the percentage of all comments in the post that were replies to the shout. For example, if the most popular comment in a thread has 35 replies, and the total

number of comments to the subject is 100, then loudness of the comment would be 35/100, or 35%. (Yucel, 2011, pp. 56-57)

I am looking for a correlation of changes made to official *Explosion Bus* content and higher-level audience responses (creative acts with higher degrees of difficulty) thereafter, which might suggest higher levels of engagement. Lastly, I will identify any markers in the content that might suggest reasons for changes in audience roles and/or size.

Coding Levels of Engagement

As of June 22, 2013, there were 155 publically available videos on the *Explosion Bus* channel on YouTube.com, most of which were created by the *Explosion Bus* team. Episodes were also linked from the official *Explosion Bus* webpage. In addition to these videos are five other featured subchannels that contain videos and video series pertaining to the *Explosion Bus* brand (Stream #6, as listed above) including “The Pitch Show,” a series created by the same fans that created *The Talent Scouts*. Once production on *Explosion Bus* was over, Tim Barnes and Ian Abramson asked Tom Snyder if he would be willing to participate in *their* show.

Granted, these streams only measure the activities of those viewers who played measurable and active roles within the viewing network. They do not reveal how many more viewers actually viewed any of the episodes of *Explosion Bus* (strictly viewers/lurkers). This is where triangulating the information with analytic data of the videos and website can at least point to audience exposure. The data streams have been subcoded into several classifications, which borrow from the field of sentiment analysis (see section on Coding Qualitative Data, p. 124), regardless of whether a comment or creative output was positive, neutral or negative toward the original *Explosion Bus* content. These data streams offer a reasonable picture of the overall opinions of members within the *Explosion Bus* viewing network, and suggest ways in

which Internet affordances might have been used to resonate with viewers or might actually have played a part in discouraging them.

Table 1. Case Study Continuum of Engagement.

Engagement Level	<i>Explosion Bus</i> channel viewer activity continuum
1.	Clicked on a link
2.	Viewed under 50%
3.	Viewed over 50%
4.	Shared/ <i>Explosion Bus</i> video placed in another channel's playlist ²
5.	Click on annotations (subscribe or view other <i>Explosion Bus</i> content)
6.	Disliked
7.	Liked
8.	Subscribed
9.	Commented negatively: five words or fewer
10.	Commented neutrally: five words or fewer
11.	Commented positively: five words or fewer
12.	Commented neutrally: more than five words
13.	Commented negatively: more than five words
14.	Commented negatively: more than five words
15.	Intense positive comment
16.	Created an <i>Explosion Bus</i> audition video
17.	Created an <i>Explosion Bus</i> spin-off series
18.	Created an <i>Explosion Bus</i> recap series (included reediting and configuring EB content)
19.	Created a related series entirely on their own and asked the <i>Explosion Bus</i> team to participate

Each of these items has been ordered by the degree of difficulty for each activity. Like Mayfield, Napoli and McGuire have done, these activities have been arranged into a continuum

² The sharing of *Explosion Bus* videos in other YouTube playlists was not a feature tallied in the analytics during the first phases of the *Explosion Bus* channel. Playlist data will therefore not be included. However, it is germane to note that the first day an *Explosion Bus* episode appeared in another viewer's playlist was January 16, 2014 and by October 31, 2016, *Explosion Bus* videos were in 327 playlists.

of engagement specifically for the context of this case study. Clicking, viewing and watching a portion of an episode are deemed lower level activities because they do not require a login to YouTube. Sharing and clicking on annotations shows a higher level of engagement by either expressing a desire for more content, or spreading the word about the series to other social networks. Comments are not only subdivided into positive, neutral and negative, but by the number of words used in the comment. This decision assumes the time requirements to complete the task. For instance, a ≤ 5 pos comment is deemed lower than a > 5 neg comment, because the negative viewer exhibits a desire to communicate their comment in more than five words—taking up more time, and requiring more compositional and cognitive activities. It is also fair to say that most of the > 5 neg comments were coded as “-CC,” or expressing constructive criticism—another component showing engagement (see next section for the distinctions of the coding). Midrange activities such as liking, disliking, subscribing and commenting all require taking the time to create a YouTube account and logging into it to be able to complete the activity. Higher-end activities such as creating audition videos and spin-off series clearly require a deeper sense of engagement in time, in cognitive requirements and in a sensibility or affinity with the tone of *Explosion Bus*.

Coding Qualitative Data

Because quantitative data primarily consists of numbers and percentages, qualitative responses can be more useful to inform producers (content providers) of the intensity of engagement and the overall “success” of the provider’s content. If a comment conveys a negative or positive message, there needs to be a deeper analysis of the intensity of the comment based on wording and punctuation cues (such as all caps or multiple exclamation points (“!!!!”). Therefore, positive comments conveying an intensity of opinion (i.e. “I LOVE THIS

SHOW!!!!”) are subcoded as “IntensPos.” In Phase Four, there is an additional IntensPos category based on a task given to viewers of the *Homo Erectus* series: viewers were asked for ideas for future episodes. This additional IntensPos category is referred to in the data charts as “plot idea” and only appears in Phase Four.

Negative comments also have subcodes due to a distinction of rhetorical intent and what “negative” means to the *Explosion Bus* content providers. For instance, a comment citing a negative feeling about a specific quality or attribute about the show, or a suggestion for improvement actually serves as constructive criticism (-CC) and therefore a higher level of engagement since the viewer is thinking critically and expressing how the show could be improved. Other negative comments that emit an insulting tone or vitriol are categorized as “-Troll,” based on the common parlance of negative commenters on the Internet.

Neutral comments contain three subcategories based on whether it is determined that the comment serves one of three roles— (a) “-Query:” the viewer is asking a question about the show or related shows, indicating a curiosity, (b) “-Understanding:” comments are neutral to *Explosion Bus*, but demonstrate an affinity for other Snyder or Katz productions, and (c) “-Joke:” the viewer isn’t making a positive comment about the *Explosion Bus* show, but is attempting to use the same comedic tone as the series. All of these subcategories for neutral comments indicate a positive engagement with *Explosion Bus*, even though they may not be making positive statements about the show. Creative acts of the *Explosion Bus* community were triangulated with some basic, quantitative data, some of which are visible from the user’s perspective on YouTube, and other data came from the analytics of both the *Explosion Bus* YouTube channel and the separate ExplosionBus.com website. The analytic data also served to minimize bias.

Once all the data had been compiled, coded and analyzed, I examined patterns across the phases. My interpretations of these patterns are included in chapter five.

BIASES AND ASSUMPTIONS

As my involvement with *Explosion Bus* metamorphosed from my first being a fan, to an academic reviewer, to ultimately a new media consultant, it is fair to assume earlier biases could have impacted the professional relationship. However, my experience with other types of subject matter experts quickly provided a balance in my dealings with the *Explosion Bus* team. My professional background has included many media fields and often their purposes overlapped into the educational. I have worked on educational television shows aired on Public Broadcasting Service and The Learning Channel (back when it offered educational productions). I have created graphics for corporate training textbooks, animations for video training products and Internet streaming, and interactive soft skills and regulatory training modules. I have worked with university professors, and trainers in the federal government and the corporate sector. While in this doctoral program, I have also consulted with several entertainers and casually shared what I have already learned from this project. In each context, I have seen gaps between their fields of expertise and best practices in new media, whether it has been used to teach, train or entertain.

These gaps, in turn, inform the assumptions these experts have about Internet technologies, communities and how online content can pay for itself (of particular concern to many entertainers). My professional experience informs my desire to use the results of this research for the good of content providers, and not necessarily to critique industry practices currently taking shape or already in operation. My process in each context is the same: learn what the objective is, suggest the best protocol to achieve that objective and, as a consultant, stay out of the way of the content (i.e. do not let personal preferences drive the suggestions).

As I mentioned in the Literature Review, Bourdieu's concept of habitus plays a great part in how I view human systems. Since networks are comprised of nodes and hubs that perform different functions, each node within a network does not perform the same role. Because there is a correlation between positions (roles) and dispositions of the people in those roles, that would mean that individuals are drawn to those roles that somehow best suit their personal needs for articulating with that network. Based on this and in my own experience as a fan, I assume underlying needs of individuals feed their level of interest, time and effort they are willing to take on within a communicative, cultural space or field.

Another element of my background that informs my approach to this project is my undergraduate study in studio art. I started my career in art and created images simply because I found myself drawn to create. Perhaps naïvely, my desire to create images came from within and not because anyone around me mandated or even requested that I do so. I, therefore, tend to favor agency over structures in society as guiding external behaviors. James G. Webster describes "structuration," in *The Marketplace of Attention* (2014), which asserts that although human beings have a great deal of agency, societal structures guide, direct and often limit that agency. I have come to agree that societal structures do play a part in guiding what behaviors or ambitions are even possible. Structuration strikes a balance between agency and structures. It explains how some humans are still able to maneuver around structures that block other humans. Therefore, my views have shifted to align with structuration theory rather than with a foregrounding of either agency or structures.

I have watched how the field of English studies groups previously marginalized voices into large categories—women's studies, queer studies, African American studies, etc. I understand why initially this was significant and necessary after centuries of a Western, white

male dominance. However, to assume that any singular member within these groups should be defined by this broader category is something we need to move beyond. No one woman can, nor should, speak for all women. Personality types, for instance, can cross these very broad and simplified groups as there are so many ways to group, categorize or self-identify. Yes, demographics have been foregrounded in audience measurement systems for decades, but we are currently seeing that system change. It is changing because technology can account for individuals more easily than in the past. Online, people can express more of their individual personalities within multiple conversational spaces. As sentiment analyst and social media strategist Augie Ray says, “The winner isn’t the brand with the most positive sentiment. It’s the brand with the most *right* fans expressing the most *meaningful* brand sentiment [emphasis his]” (Ray, 2013). Often a highly-engaged fan, who exhibits the desired, measurable, and quantifiable behavior content providers look for, may actually be a “maverick” individual who falls outside expected demographics. That is one of the reasons why demographic groupings are not examined quite as closely in this case study.

The concept of “levels of engagement” (or “involvement,” as it is described in communication studies circles) actually describes the habitus of the position or, specifically, the *role* each individual user is willing to or wishing to assume within the fan community network. Therefore, any analysis of user “produsage,” be it a comment, a “like” or “dislike,” or a complex homemade video, should also include the consideration of what purpose or *role* the user is taking with *each* created expression. James E. Kinneavy cites Four Basic Purposes of Composition: Expressive, Referential, Literary and Persuasive purposes (Kinneavy, 1969, p.302). These roles are fluid. One user can assume multiple roles within the network, based on the content they contribute to that network. Likewise, as the saying goes, “fame is a fickle mistress.” It cannot be

assumed that once a user has been identified as a highly dedicated fan of a cultural product, they will always be as highly dedicated or even remain within the same fan community. This is why examinations of fan expressions should also be considered “over time.”

POTENTIAL ISSUES WITH THE DATA

With this methodology, there is no easy method to verify the identity or demographics of viewers, or if the viewers are always indeed actual, distinct individuals. Analytic information is available, which state demographic and geographic delineations of the viewing audience, but to assume this data cannot be manipulated is somewhat naïve. As I am more focused on the content provider, it is a somewhat moot point anyway, and since the overall viewing numbers are not that high, it is my assumption that there were not many, if any, instances of viewers’ artificially inflating analytic numbers. Also, this project does not account for “lurking” viewers apart from their having clicked on a link to view a video. Nor does it attempt to explain or account for non-participating viewers.

Another issue regarding measuring before and after engagement is that once changes were made to *EB* content, it may not be possible to see evidence in viewers’ responses that they had ever been exposed to the *EB* content before these changes had been made. In other words, this project doesn’t attempt to address whether these formatting changes improved engagement for the same viewers from phase to phase.

Another issue with measuring the data is that some *Explosion Bus* webpage data is missing from September 20, 2012 to January 20, 2013. This was due to the *EB* webmaster’s having changed webpage providers before he realized I needed to collect data from the original page and before he terminated the contract with the original website. This should only have provided analytic information from the initial version of the *Explosion Bus* webpage.

Another qualification which should be made is that the sharing of *EB* video links should not imply a necessary widening of the audience. Bondad-Brown's use of Uses and Gratifications theory (U&G) and contextual age in the context of online viewing yields some surprising but useful nuances. Whereas content sharing (sending a friend a link to a video) might indicate the sender's interest in the video, it does not manifest a tie to the receiver's likelihood to open the link or view the content (Bondad-Brown, 2011, p. 71), probably because "recommendation sources are relatively passive, and unsolicited, they do not guarantee users will view the clips" (Bondad-Brown, 2011, p. 72). However, when a viewer/computer user searches for content themselves (in search engines via keywords), this behavior shows a greater interest on the part of that user. Bondad-Brown found that "the use of user-provided comments on video sharing sites was related to greater online video use which suggests that input from other viewers is still relevant and useful" (Bondad-Brown, 2011, p. 72). These nuances need to be taken into consideration.

Now that the phasic approach toward data collection and analysis has been explained, chapter four follows the assumptions, work and output of the content provider (Snyder's team) through each phase, followed by the results of measurable quantitative and qualitative viewer responses (including my input), which, in turn, inform the content providers' assumptions, work and output for subsequent phases.

CHAPTER IV

IMPLEMENTATION AND RESULTS

This chapter reviews the cyclical activities of the content provider and its audience members across five chronological phases. Each phase is featured in its own section and covers the activities of the *Explosion Bus (EB)* team from their initial posts of new content on their YouTube channel and webpage, followed by the measurable quantitative and qualitative responses of their viewers. These responses align with different levels of engagement. The quantitative responses feed directly to the content provider via analytics reports. The qualitative responses can be seen by other viewers and require a closer examination of textual (not numerical) analysis. Each phase includes the assumptions behind the original design decisions of the *Explosion Bus* website and longer video episodes, as well as the work and output of the *EB* team up to the start of the next phase. Each phase lists the *Explosion Bus* episodes created and designed with a particular format for that phase. The phase begins when the first new video has been posted on YouTube and ExplosionBus.com with decisive changes to the format of the *Explosion Bus* episodes and the official website.

Phase One (September 12, 2011-March 10, 2012) begins with the posting of *Explosion Bus Episode One: "The Outrage"* (2011) on YouTube and the *EB* webpage, followed by six other episodes, each approximately 20 minutes in length and posted at weekly intervals. These episodes were designed and formatted by the *EB* team before my involvement. The latter part of Phase One includes some initial suggestions I offered the team based on my instructional design training, which encourages audience engagement. Phase Two (March 11, 2012-September 16, 2012) begins with the posting of the first modified episode, based on my input, and includes a more in-depth analysis of viewer responses before and after these suggestions were

implemented. Phase Three (September 17, 2012-March 12, 2013) marks another point of dramatic change in the format of the episodes and design of the *Explosion Bus* website as the team took my input farther and injected their own strategies to attract an audience. Each phase includes a section on the activities of the core creative team (the assumptions, work and output, including the designs of the webpage and episodes), analytic data pertaining to measurable responses in the *Explosion Bus* audience and qualitative data of viewer activities, which require a closer analysis. The end of each phase includes an at-a-glance chart displaying the overall activities of the *Explosion Bus* viewing network for that phase. These activities point to a modest increase in audience engagement as time moved along.

Before and after the three main *Explosion Bus* webpage and video phases are two additional YouTube phases. The first phase in this chapter is actually referred to as Phase Zero (July 10, 2011-September 11, 2011) because it is before the *Explosion Bus* episodes were completed and posted. It was during Phase Zero that the *EB* team began promoting the series and cast members to an outside audience. Phase Four (March 13, 2013-March 30, 2014) shows how the *EB* team applied lessons they learned from the *Explosion Bus* “experiment” to another online animated comedy series. My rationale for including a Phase Zero and a Phase Four in this dissertation is to add another level of comparison around the *Explosion Bus* network activities. An interpretation of the overall results is covered in chapter five.

PHASE ZERO: JULY 10, 2011—SEPTEMBER 11, 2011

The Assumptions, “The Work” and the Output

The conceptualization of the audience had originally been based on what Snyder’s work had been in traditional broadcasting. In a personal interview with Snyder (Snyder, 2016), he admits the original conceptualization of the audience was himself. If he found the content

entertaining, that is all that mattered.¹ For Snyder, the main work was to create a team of individuals who could make each other laugh. If other people enjoyed the work and could pay for it to continue, he acknowledges that would be rewarding as well. This complicated the work for Covett, as she was tasked to be the main communicator with the *Explosion Bus* audience, without being the creator or an initially recognizable member of the cast. However, since her main task was to assist Snyder in accomplishing his goals, she was happy to undertake this work.

Hired straight out of undergraduate studies in religion and philosophy, Covett had been working for Jonathan Katz as his personal assistant. Katz's friendship and collaborations with Snyder began with *Dr. Katz: Professional Therapist* on The Comedy Central cable network (May 1995-February 2002), and continued well after the series had ended with weekly lunches and many phone calls. In 2005/2006, Katz and Snyder had already pitched the idea of *Explosion Bus* to a number of networks, but programmers were not interested. By 2009/2010, Snyder and Katz had noticed some of their professional friends were creating content for the Internet, and this inspired Snyder to try it too. By the time Covett began working for Katz, he and Snyder had rekindled their interest in the series and based it on a model similar to ABC's enigmatic drama series, *Lost*. The original plan for *Explosion Bus* was that the story would take place along a five-year timeline, told in and out of sequence. The show's complicated plot twists were meant to invoke a sense of mystery in viewers and hopefully inspire them to theorize about the arc of the overall narrative. The episodes of the show would be paced along the actual dates of initial posting—if an episode was originally posted on October 31, it would also be Halloween in the episode posted that day.

¹ Snyder's perspectives were drawn from a face-to-face interview November 29, 2016. Covett's perspectives were drawn from a Skype interview on November 30, 2016.

Covett originally split her work time between Katz and Snyder. However, as Snyder had more work for her developing the *Explosion Bus* project, Katz allowed Covett to work full time for Snyder. Her duties started with posting ads to get creative people involved with the project, coordinating auditions, and booking locations to meet and audition “contestants.” She later began to contribute a few script ideas occasionally as well. As the show’s production began to escalate, Covett’s duties expanded to include more production-related tasks such as audio editing, finding an animator, video editing, learning about file formats, and creating backgrounds with Photoshopped photographs. Once they had promotional and episode content, she also moved into overseeing the *Explosion Bus* channel on YouTube, as well as promoting the show via social media and interacting with viewers.

Snyder says the complicated story with silly and yet serious twisting components spanning a five-year arc was too difficult to sell to network programmers. The work for Snyder was conceptualized to be similar to the work he had done in traditional broadcast television, except he did not need to pitch the show to get it online and he would need to fund it himself. Doing it himself also meant Snyder would not have arguments with his staff on content, as Snyder had no one else to answer to. “This was all about my taste,” says Snyder (Cooke & Snyder, 2016).

Snyder’s work at in Phase Zero included the following: hire his producer (Covett), set up interviews and audition supporting cast, develop the outline of the five-year story arc, write the more detailed outline for the first episodes, find a location to record, hire a sound engineer and record the improvised dialog.² Once recorded, Snyder poured over approximately four hours of

² Snyder’s standard procedure for dialog development was to outline the basics of what plot points would occur in a scene, then ask the actors to improvise the dialog that would achieve these points. There was no written script.

material to edit into each 20-minute show. Concurrently, Snyder focused on getting the *Explosion Bus* website designed and developed.

Apart from the ostensibly appointment-based programming and 20-minute long episodes, Snyder believed the philosophical work ethic from traditional broadcasting informed the deadlines he created for himself; every two weeks, he wanted to turn out another episode. The desire to work so quickly also impacted the quality level but, to Snyder, offering finished work was more important than perfect work. The style of “animation” of *Explosion Bus* was actually closer to an animatic presentation, rather than animation.³

During Phase Zero, Snyder’s team posted six promotional videos on the *Explosion Bus* YouTube channel, which also were embedded into the *Explosion Bus* website. Each of these videos introduced members of the cast and creative team. Each of the descriptions under these YouTube videos directed the viewer to visit www.explosionbus.com on September 13, 2011, though nowhere in the video content were viewers directed to subscribe to the YouTube *Explosion Bus* channel.

Also posted on August 15, 2011 was a three-minute, live-action mock interview supposedly set in the year 2016. An off-screen Tom Snyder asks Jonathan Katz and Tom Leopold to look back on their experiences with the show as if the entire series had already been completed and “broadcast.” The interview was comical and not meant to educate the audience in any way. Also posted between August 15 and September 2, 2011 were brief introductions of supporting actors Dan Weber (“Brad”), Misch Whitaker (“Katie”) and animator Bob Keough,

³ Animatics are preliminary versions of animated films, comprised mostly of static image sequences (often pulled from a drawn storyboard) that are later replaced by fuller, moving animated drawings once they are completed. These images are timed to the already recorded audio, which drives the timing of the animation. Snyder chose this static style because it was quick, inexpensive, lowered staffing needs but would not compromise the story.

and two audio-only auditions of “*Talent Explosion*” contestants—Stacy (a singer) and Owen, a 10-year-old comedian.

Data Analysis Specifics

The *Explosion Bus* channel posts during Phase Zero start with decisions Snyder and the *EB* team made. As represented in my conceptual framework diagram (see Fig. 1), his decisions were rhetorical choices that correspond to decisions made by rhetoricians, communicators and/or teachers—the invention of the message, the intended audience, the style and arrangement of the message and delivery system. For Phase One, Snyder decided he would post 20-minute entertainment episodes on the Internet only, accessible from YouTube and Snyder’s own *ExplosionBus.com*. Snyder was interested in satisfying his own taste for humor and having an audience that possessed a similar sensibility. His decisions started the cycle and they correspond to McGuire’s “Input Communication Factors:” Source, Message, Channel, Receiver and Destination.

The resulting analytics and related qualitative data reveal choices made by the viewer/user. In McGuire’s matrix, some of his 13 “Output Persuasion Steps” do not apply to this case study due to its emphasis on Snyder’s decisions. However, many steps do apply or are implied in the responses this case study examines. For instance, McGuire’s first steps are comparable to much of the analytic data from the *Explosion Bus* viewing network:

Table 2. McGuire's Output Persuasion Steps and Corresponding Categories with *Explosion Bus*.

No. McGuire's Output Persuasion Steps	<i>EB</i> Coding Category
1. Tuning in (exposure to the communication)	Viewer clicked on link
2. Attending to the communication	Viewer watched a % of the content
3. Liking it, maintaining interest in it.	Viewer watched 100%
4. Comprehending its contents (learning what)	Viewer made informed comment
5. Generating related cognitions	Joked with the <i>EB</i> team
6. Acquiring relevant skills (learning how)	Viewer submitted audition videos
7. Agreeing with communication's position (attitude change)	Liked videos
8. Storing this new position in memory	N/A
9. Retrieval of the new position from memory when relevant	N/A
10. Decision to act on the basis of the retrieved position	Subscribed to <i>EB</i> channel.
11. Acting on it	Ordered items from ExplosionBus.com
12. Post-action cognitive integration of this behavior	Co-produced videos
13. Proselytizing others to behave likewise	Viewer shared <i>EB</i> link(s)

Several of Mayfield's Power Law of Participation activities apply to this case study due to its focus on Internet interactions. However, I have modified Mayfield's continuum. In Mayfield's framework, audience activities run from low demonstrated engagement/cognitive effort to high in the following order: (a) Read; (b) Favorite; (c) Tag; (d) Comment; (e) Subscribe; (f) Share; (g) Network; (h) Write; (i) Refactor; (j) Collaborate; (k) Moderate and (l) Lead.

My continuum reverses share and subscribe because although viewers can share content without subscribing, and viewers can subscribe without sharing, when a viewer subscribes, they must log into their YouTube account to indicate their desire for regular exposure to content. Liking or disliking a video on YouTube.com also requires a login to voice this opinion. Sharing does not require any account login. Therefore, subscribe and like/dislike are activities showing

higher engagement than sharing. As this case study does not include data from Facebook (due to *Explosion Bus*' closed group and consequential university Institutional Review Board considerations), tagging is not in my continuum, and neither is moderate, as there was no instance of moderating in the *Explosion Bus* viewing network. The closest activity to leading applies to when a couple of subscribers decided to make an *Explosion Bus*-related web series and asked Tom Snyder to participate in it instead of the other way around.

Considering the audience as students and their activities as forms of assessments, I have arranged the following activities along what I believe to be an increase of engagement levels exhibited in the *Explosion Bus* viewership:

Table 3. Case Study Continuum of Engagement and Corresponding Codes.

Engagement Level	<i>Explosion Bus</i> Channel Viewer Activity Continuum	Coded Category
1.	Clicked on a link	Clicked
2.	Viewed under 50%	<50%
3.	Viewed over 50%	>50%
4.	Shared or an <i>EB</i> video placed in another channel's playlist ⁴	Shared
5.	Click on annotations (subscribe or view other <i>EB</i> content)	Clicked Annotation
6.	Disliked	Disliked
7.	Liked	Liked
8.	Subscribed	Subscribed
9.	Commented negatively: 5 words or fewer	≤5neg (CC or Troll)
10.	Commented neutrally: 5 words or fewer	≤5neut (-U, -Joke, -Q)
11.	Commented positively: 5 words or fewer	≤5pos
12.	Commented neutrally: over 5 words	>5neg (CC or Troll)
13.	Commented negatively: over 5 words	>5neut (-U, -Joke, -Q)
14.	Commented positively: over 5 words	>5pos
15.	Intense Positive Comment	IntensPos /Plot idea
16.	Created an <i>Explosion Bus</i> audition video	Audition
17.	Created an <i>Explosion Bus</i> spin-off series	Spin-off
18.	Created an <i>Explosion Bus</i> recap series (have to re-edit and configure <i>EB</i> content)	Recap
19.	Created a related series entirely on their own and asked the <i>EB</i> team to participate	Extra series

In his dissertation, gaming and new media scholar Ibrahim Yucel created a method to gauge ways in which individual blog comments influenced other comments in discussion threads on several gaming sites. Yucel's method of measurement determined what he called "loudness:"

⁴ The sharing of *Explosion Bus* videos in other YouTube playlists was not a feature tallied in the analytics during the first phases of the *EB* channel. Playlist data will therefore not be included. However, it is germane to note that the first day an *Explosion Bus* episode appeared in another viewer's playlist was January 16, 2014 and by October 31, 2016, *EB* videos were in 327 playlists.

The two primary metrics to determine the “volume” or “loudness” of the comment were the number of replies the comment received and the percentage of all the comments on a topic that were replies to the comment. This thread percentage value indicates how capable a comment was in controlling the conversation and is referred to as loudness. (Yucel, 2011, p. 56)

In a similar vein, I’m looking at the overall numbers of measurable activities within the *Explosion Bus* viewing network. I am determining if there was an increase of higher level activities during each phase once recommended changes had been implemented. As higher-level activities increased, they could indicate a growing degree of impact (or loudness) on the community. All qualitative and quantitative data in these categories are factored into an overall tally and compared across phases.

Analytic/Quantitative Data for Phase Zero

Below are the total number of EB promotional videos and subsequent viewer activities of Phase Zero, as of September 11, 2011—the day before Phase One began (when the original version of the first *Explosion Bus* episode was posted)—as recorded through Google Analytics and triangulated with my data collection of the comments.⁵

⁵ Occasionally analytic numbers disagreed with the actual comment data. If a viewer made a comment, then deleted either it, or their own, account, the comment number in the analytics remained, while the actual content of the comment was deleted and therefore could not be categorized.

Table 4. Analytic Data for All Phase Zero Videos.

No.	Original episodes (date posted)	Views	Likes	Dislikes	Shares	Subscribers	Comments
1.	What is <i>Explosion Bus</i> ? (Full Teaser) (8/14/11)	229	5	-	1	-	1
2.	What is <i>Explosion Bus</i> ? Part 1 "Elementary Education" (8/14/11)	32	-	-	-	-	-
3.	What is <i>Explosion Bus</i> ? Part 3 "Talent Auditions" (8/14/11)	190	3	-	1	1	2
4.	What is <i>Explosion Bus</i> ? Part 4 "Treachery" (8/14/11)	19	-	-	-	-	-
5.	What is <i>Explosion Bus</i> ? Part 2 "Romance" (8/14/11)	30	-	-	-	-	-
6.	What is <i>Explosion Bus</i> ? Part 5 "Government" (8/14/11)	15	-	-	-	-	-
7.	What is <i>Explosion Bus</i> ? Part 6 "Medicine" (8/14/11)	12	-	-	-	-	-
8.	Jon and Tom in 2016 (8/15/11)	91	2	-	-	-	-
9.	<i>Explosion Bus</i> "Brad" in real life (8/15/11)	167	-	-	-	-	-
10.	" <i>Explosion Bus</i> " Senior Animator, Bob Keough (8/15/11)	39	-	-	-	-	-
11.	<i>Explosion Bus</i> ' Misch Whitaker (8/16/11)	33	-	-	-	-	-
12.	<i>Explosion Bus</i> : Stacey's Audition (just audio) (9/1/11)	16	-	-	-	-	-
13.	<i>Explosion Bus</i> : Owen's Audition (just audio) (9/2/11)	19	-	-	-	-	-

The first videos posted on the *Explosion Bus* channel (on August 14, 2011) were promos that answered the question, “*What is Explosion Bus?*” There was a “*Full Teaser*” (229⁶ views), 6.17 minutes in length, which was also divided into six shorter, separate “*What is Explosion Bus?*” parts, entitled “*Elementary Education*” (32 views), “*Talent Auditions*” (190 views), “*Treachery*” (19 views), “*Romance*” (30 views), “*Government*”(15 views) and “*Medicine*” (12 views).

No videos during Phase Zero had any “annotations,” which are clickable text boxes (buttons) that can be added to YouTube videos to trigger desired actions, such as playing another video or skipping to another webpage. Whenever a content provider first posts a video on YouTube, the annotation features are accessed via a tab called “Call to Action,” for that is in essence what these triggers are for—letting viewers know the content provider’s expectations. Providing buttons to subscribe, skip to a webpage or watch other videos makes these “calls to action” easy on the viewer. This also offers the content provider a means to assess whether viewers are interested in viewing more content. Therefore examining “annotation clicks” is another activity this chapter looks at. However, in Phase Zero, there were no annotations placed on any of the videos; therefore, there are no “annotation clicks” in the data.

⁶ Analytical data as of 11 September 2011, the last date of Phase 0.

Table 5. Phase Zero Viewing Habits.

No.	Phase Zero Videos (date posted)	Length	Average% of video viewed	Views
1.	What is <i>Explosion Bus</i> ? (Full Teaser) (8/14/11)	6.17	36.2	29
2.	What is <i>Explosion Bus</i> ? Part 1 "Elementary Education" (8/14/11)	1.38	58.96	32
3.	What is <i>Explosion Bus</i> ? Part 3 "Talent Auditions" (8/14/11)	1.65	63.29	190
4.	What is <i>Explosion Bus</i> ? Part 4 "Treachery" (8/14/11)	1.17	66.8	19
5.	What is <i>Explosion Bus</i> ? Part 2 "Romance" (8/14/11)	0.92	63.53	30
6.	What is <i>Explosion Bus</i> ? Part 5 "Government" (8/14/11)	1.18	56.1	15
7.	What is <i>Explosion Bus</i> ? Part 6 "Medicine" (8/14/11)	0.85	56.37	12
8.	Jon and Tom in 2016 (8/15/11)	3.02	55.07	91
9.	<i>Explosion Bus</i> "Brad" in real life (8/15/11)	3.07	40.93	167
10.	" <i>Explosion Bus</i> " Senior Animator, Bob Keough (8/15/11)	4.17	22.48	39
11.	<i>Explosion Bus</i> 's Misch Whitaker (8/16/11)	3.87	39.19	33
12.	<i>Explosion Bus</i> : Stacey's Audition (JUST AUDIO) (9/1/11)	4.35	29.92	16
13.	<i>Explosion Bus</i> : Owen's Audition (JUST AUDIO) (9/2/11)	5.70	30.44	19

Qualitative Data/Coding for Phase Zero

Understandably, viewer activity during this phase was low, with the highest number of views coming from the *Explosion Bus* "Full Teaser" (229 views). It also received one like and one positive comment by September 11, 2011. The highest percentage of a video viewed (the duration of the viewer actually letting the content play) came from "What is *Explosion Bus*? *Romance*" with 30 views and an average duration of viewership of 63.53 percent of the video viewed. The poorest performer was "What is *Explosion Bus*? *Medicine*," with a mere 12 views and an average viewing time of 35 seconds (56.37 percent average view duration) by September 11, 2011. Most of the Phase Zero videos had no comments. The comments received

during this phase were all positive (e.g. “Very interesting, even provocative and amusing too.” and “Can’t wait for the series (smile smile)”) (Mary Morra5, 2011).

Table 6. Phase Zero Comments and Nuanced Codes.

Latter Phase 0 Comments	Overall Number of Comments	Positive Subcodes	Neutral Subcodes	Negative Subcodes
Videos posted July 10, 2011 –September 11, 2011		IntensPos	-Query -Joke -U	-CC -Troll
# of EB Channel Videos Comments	14			
≤5 wd. Neg	-	-	-	-
>5 wd. Neg	-	-	-	-
≤5 wd. Neut	-	-	-	-
>5 wd. Neut	-	-	-	-
≤5 wd. Pos	-	-	-	-
>5 wd. Pos	3	2 IntensPos	-	-
EB/Team Comments	-	-	-	-

Table 7. Specific Phase Zero Comments and Nuanced Codes.

No.	Original episodes (date posted)	Comments ⁷	Nuanced Comment Code
1.	What is <i>Explosion Bus?</i> (Full Teaser)	Irwin Leba 5 years ago Very interesting, even provocative and amusing too. Best of continued success with this "break through" venture! Alan Abel PS Effective music cues also.	>5Pos
2.	What is <i>Explosion Bus?</i> Part 1 "Elementary Education"	No comments	-
3.	What is <i>Explosion Bus?</i> Part 3 "Talent Auditions"	Mary Morra5 years ago awesome!!!! who's the awesome blond singer? Can't wait for the series (smile smile)	>5Pos /IntensPos
		Mary Morra5 years ago awesome!!!! who's the awesome blond singer?	>5Pos /IntensPos
4.	What is <i>Explosion Bus?</i> Part 4 "Treachery"	No comments	-
5.	What is <i>Explosion Bus?</i> Part 2 "Romance"	No comments	-
6.	What is <i>Explosion Bus?</i> Part 5 "Government"	No comments	-
7.	What is <i>Explosion Bus?</i> Part 6 "Medicine"	No comments	-
8.	Jon and Tom in 2016	No comments	-
9.	<i>Explosion Bus</i> "Brad" in real life	No comments	-
10.	" <i>Explosion Bus</i> " Senior Animator, Bob Keough	No comments	-
11.	<i>Explosion Bus</i> ' Misch Whitaker	No comments	-

⁷ Retrieved December 20, 2016.

Table 7. Continued.

No.	Original episodes (date posted)	Comments ⁸	Nuanced Comment Code
12.	<i>Explosion Bus:</i> Stacey's Audition (just audio)	No comments	-
13.	<i>Explosion Bus:</i> Owen's Audition (just audio)	No comments	-

These data predate the first seven *Explosion Bus* episodes and are merely provided as a baseline with which subsequent phases will be compared. At this point, there were only three comments across 13 videos and they are all positive. Two of the positive comments were intensely positive and appears to be an accidental multiple of one comment. There were no “lessons learned” during Phase Zero, although the data suggest many of these interactions might have been from viewers with direct ties to the show, as there had been no other promotions for the show at this point. A comparison of the main viewer activities is tallied in Appendix H.

⁸ Retrieved December 20, 2016.

Table 8. Overall Tally of *Explosion Bus* Activities During Phase Zero.

Activities	Phase 0
<i>EB</i> page visitors	217 ⁹
<i>EB</i> page views	11,496
# of <i>EB</i> YouTube videos	13 shorts
YouTube views /clicks	892 (no episodes)
Videos with zero comments	4 promos + 4 cast auditions = 8
<50% episode viewed	46.15%
>50% episode viewed	53.84%
Average % of episode viewed	47.63692
Shared	2
Annotation clicks	-
Disliked	-
Liked	10
Subscribed	1
Comments ¹⁰	3
<5 wd. Neg	-
>5 wd. Neg	-
-Constructive	-
-Troll	-
<5 wd. Neut	-
>5 wd. Neut	-
-Joke	-
-Query	-
-Understand	-
<5 wd. Pos	-
>5 wd. Pos	3
IntensPos	2
<i>EB</i> /Team Comments	1
Audition	-
Spin-off	-
Recap	-
Extra series	-

⁹ Phase Zero Google Analytics, from July 1, 2011-September 2011. Google Analytics also shows an average session duration of 12:51 minutes, and a bounce rate of 27.78 percent.

¹⁰ Comments= total number of individual comments. These do not include comments by *EB* team members. Comments that depict higher levels of interest are included in the total number of comments, but also counted separately.

PHASE ONE: SEPTEMBER 12, 2011—MARCH 10, 2012

The Assumptions, “The Work” and the Output

During Phase One, between September 12, 2011 and November 2, 2011, in the guise of a traditional broadcasting network, Snyder’s team posted seven weekly 20-minute episodes on Tuesdays at approximately 8:30 P.M. The decision to post Internet-only content had nothing to do with maintaining creative control. Snyder reports that he already had 100 percent creative control when he dealt with television networks. This is not typical in traditional television. He believes this favor was due to having sufficient initial viewership of *Dr. Katz Professional Therapist*, and having won an Emmy within nine months of the first Dr. Katz episode’s airing on the Comedy Central cable network. With *Dr. Katz*, Snyder had also been given the atypical luxury of an initial nine-month incubation period wherein he and Jonathan Katz figured out what their show was going to be, before any other episodes had to be submitted to the network. With *Explosion Bus*, however, Snyder had been concentrating on the work mentioned in Phase Zero and solidifying the arc of the story, but as he hired more people to work on the series, he was open to making modifications to the series based on the feedback he was getting from them. The results of the *EB* team’s decisions for Phase One are reviewed in the next two sections covering the design of the ExplosionBus.com webpage and the format of the individual episodes. These sections are followed by an assessment of the issues the original formats exhibited, and an analysis of the original formats based on my instructional design training, including some components adapted from the Quality Matters rubric. Lastly, this section cites the overall analytic/quantitative and qualitative data retrieved during Phase One, and the beginning of implemented suggestions. Lastly, the section covers the overall lessons learned. Except for the

initial instructional review process, the rest of this chapter's sections follow a similar pattern for the subsequent phases.

Phase One: Webpage Design

As stated earlier, I originally ignored Jonathan Katz's first *Explosion Bus* announcement, but a week later (on September 20, 2011), I clicked on Katz's second announcement (see Appendix A). On the page was a large header reading "EXPLOSION BUS" with a subheader, "from the creators of 'Dr. Katz.'" Links to Twitter and Facebook were also on the subheader. When *Explosion Bus* first appeared on explosionbus.com, each of the seven episodes was made available on Tuesday evenings (allegedly at 8:30 P.M. EST, although it was often available after 5 or 6 P.M.), and was followed by a synchronous one-hour text chat with the creators at 9 P.M.



Fig. 2. Phase One version of *Explosion Bus* website. Screenshot by author.

To the left was a sort of rectangular sticker (as if quickly stuck on at an angle), which read, “COUNTDOWN to NEXT EPISODE:” Below it was a day, hour and minute counter. Below that was a vertical navigation area complete with a small illustration of a house (which brought the user to the home page) and the following options: EPISODES, EXTRAS, TALK, STORE and ABOUT. The main content area to the right of the navigation was filled with a graphic of an old-fashioned television set. In the TV screen was a large PLAY button in the center of an image from the current available episode. Below the image were standard video controls (play, duration, sound and make full screen). Legal and logistical information in small, light grey font was at the very bottom of the webpage: “© 2011 *Explosion Bus*, LLC. Questions? Comments? Contact us. View our Terms of Service and Privacy Policy.”

Phase One: Episode Format

After I looked over the page, I clicked on the PLAY button in the TV screen and the second episode of *Explosion Bus* began with “Previously, on *Explosion Bus*,” and a one-minute summary of what had occurred in episode one. Next, the show featured an opening credits sequence that lasted 45 seconds. The credit sequence included a cryptic statement: “Some things are just becoming other things,” which instantly created a sense of mystery. So, *Explosion Bus* was the title for a new animated comedy series. Until I clicked that button I did not realize that. The show ended with a 40-second promo: “Next on *Explosion Bus* (in Sketchy Vision),” followed by two screens of text: “The best time slot on the Internet” and “Tuesdays at 8:30.” The episode ended with a minute-long closing credits roll.

One thing I immediately noticed about the episode was its length. The first two episodes available that first time I visited the site were 18:23 and 20:19 in length, respectively. I realized

this was nearly the same length of a standard half-hour comedy show without commercials on cable or broadcast television.¹¹

As I viewed the first episode, I thought about my having not watched the first week simply because I had not realized Jonathan Katz was announcing his new comedy web series. My thoughts turned to the Quality Matters rubric training I had received and how Explosionbus.com (and Katz's announcement) could have benefitted from the rubric in this entertainment context.

Phase One Issues: Clarity—Navigation, Objectives, Sequencing and Time

Once the *Explosion Bus* episode ended, I explored the *Explosion Bus* webpage, and clicked through all of the navigation options, as if I were reviewing an online course as per my Quality Matters training. Most of the issues pertained to navigability, clarity and expressing desired outcomes. With that perspective, several "Course Overview and Introduction" components jumped out at me that could have made navigation and expectations clearer. I will explain what I mean by "expectations" shortly.

On explosionbus.com, the first two QM concepts were clearly not covered:

- 1.1. "Instructions make clear how to get started and where to find various course components."
- 1.2. A statement introducing the student "to the purpose and structure of the course" and to its components; in the case of a hybrid course, the statement clarifies the relationship between the face-to-face and online components (Quality Matters, 2012).

¹¹ According to Joe Flint of the *Los Angeles Times*, in 2013, the average amount of advertisement time within an hour block of cable television programming was 15 minutes and 38 seconds, up from 14 minutes and 27 seconds per hour in 2009.

Expectations, or objectives, of the chats were only hinted at in Katz's original announcement ("What would Dr. Katz think of Jon Gold? Ask Jonathan Katz yourself"), but this expectation was not really reiterated during the discussions. As a new media student, I was intrigued by the fact that Snyder had even arranged regular online synchronous text chats. I automatically assumed he was using these as informal focus groups, canvassing the attending audience members for demographic information and for their opinions on what was working or not working for them. I attended my first post-airing chat at 9:00 P.M., September 20, 2011, and saw quite quickly that there seemed to be no such canvassing. Only about 11 people attended this second chat and perhaps about five or six of them were already somehow involved with the show (Snyder, Katz, Covett, Leopold, etc.). It appeared they were using the one-hour session as an opportunity to make each other laugh. My assumption was that their team would have wanted a large audience so it could be financially self-sustaining. If they did, I saw no inclination in that chat to truly have a dialog with their audience.

In education, "scaffolding" is the term used to refer to how objectives build upon themselves, typically (though not always) in a chronological sequence toward a progression of the objectives or knowledge covered. In QM, this concept is noted within the Assessments and Measurements standard 3.4: "The assessment instruments selected are sequenced, varied, and appropriate to the content being assessed" (Quality Matters, 2012). To complicate matters, the *Explosion Bus* story was serialized and told in flashback, which I believe created a massive problem with regard to the ease new viewers could enter or catch up with the story as it rolled out from week to week. Snyder constructed the story to unfold as part of a congressional hearing taking place four years in the future of the current date. Viewers were only made aware of this in the first couple episodes.

Another attribute of Snyder's series design was that Snyder took care to coordinate the timeline within each episode to line up with the actual date each episode was originally posted. So, if an episode was going to be posted on October 31, within the episode itself, it would be Halloween as well. The next episode would take place a week later, etc. As mentioned in my Literature Review, traditional broadcast media is "appointment based." Viewers need to coordinate their schedules with that of the network if they want to see a particular show. Currently, "on-demand" options for cable subscribers have muddied the appointment model somewhat, but even on-demand viewing often must be completed within a certain amount of time following each production's initial airing.

Time is different in other ways in online viewing experiences. "Webisodes" are posted and typically left to be discovered or pulled into viewers' computers at any time of the day or night. Sometimes they are not discovered for months or years. This means that, typically, a viewer either has to discover or stumble upon the content, or they have been told the content is available. So this playing with the time slot might have worked better in traditional broadcasting, where media is scheduled to be pushed into viewer homes on a particular day and time and with a standard duration (30 or 60 minutes). Once aired though, content is not seen again until the viewer searches for it on demand, it is broadcast in repeats or released on a DVD.

Given the issues concerning the fixed amount of time viewers have to consume content versus the ever-expanding amount of content available, anything that impairs the immediate recognition of content could impact viewer interest. In 2011, people were also not as inclined to watch longer content (i.e. videos longer than 10-15 minutes) on their small computer screens. This changed rather quickly after *Explosion Bus*' initial release, but at the time it started, the *Explosion Bus* episode format already had three strikes against it—serialization, 20-minute

lengths and shifting timelines within the plot. Viewers might have been more quickly drawn into content with a recognizable, clear, simple self-contained premise or, in the case of a linear serialized storyline, one that was compelling enough to encourage the viewer to easily review older episodes, in order to understand the story better.

Table 9 encapsulates a partial analysis of the navigational issues with the original version of *Explosion Bus* and connects them to instructional design concepts as modified from the Quality Matters review process. This is in no way an exhaustive, officially sanctioned application of their rubric, but demonstrates how the framework was applied.

Table 9. Applying Educational Concepts to an Entertainment Context.

Course Overview and Introduction	<i>EB</i> Issue	Possible Solution
Instructions make clear how to get started and where to find various course components.	The episodes were serialized and in “flash back.” This might be confusing for viewers who find later episodes first.	Provide clearer navigational instructions. How should viewers navigate through this page?
A statement introduces the student to the purpose of the course and to its components; in the case of a hybrid course, the statement clarifies the relationship between the face-to-face and online components.	The visitor to the website may not realize what the series is all about until they click on a video.	There might be a quicker way to communicate this.
The self-introduction by the instructor is appropriate and available online.	<i>EB</i> is not tied to all of the other brands Katz and Snyder have been involved with.	<i>EB</i> did say "From the Creators of Dr. Katz," which was the most well-known.
Minimum student preparation and, if applicable, prerequisite knowledge in the discipline are clearly stated.	<i>EB</i> did hope that people would spread the word. Later, <i>EB</i> also hoped for viewers to send in audition tapes for <i>EB</i> and vote for the best ones.	<i>EB</i> needed to communicate their expectations with viewers.

As stated, the original version of *Explosion Bus* website and episodes needed clearly stated objectives and enhance navigation. Although these elements are found in the Quality Matters rubric, many of the rubric's standards do not belong exclusively to Quality Matters researchers. Most of these practices have been deemed useful through broader instructional design research. For instance, the research of Helen Grady and Marjorie T. Davis have identified many of the same best practices in "Teaching Well Online with Instructional and Procedural Scaffolding"— (a) interesting visuals (2005, p. 113); (b) feedback mechanisms (2005, p. 115); (c) a clear syllabus (2005, p. 109) and (d) strong objectives that are clearly described (2005, p. 109). Each of these concepts can be tied to standard groupings in the QM rubric regarding Course Technology, Overview & Introduction, Assessment & Measurement, Learner Engagement and Learning Objectives, respectively (Appendix B).

Susan Miller-Cochran and Rochelle Rodrigo recommend that "course designs should be simple, and information should not be repeated in several different areas of the course" (2006, p.103). These also correspond to standards in the Course Technology section of the QM rubric. Likewise, in QM's Course Overview & Introduction section the user should be guided and directed through the course's "next steps," "preferably in the 'Getting Started' section" (Miller-Cochran/Rodrigo, 2006, p. 104). The structure of online course content should assure that students who come to the course via a variety of paths are able to find the same content (Miller-Cochran/Rodrigo, 2006, p.104). Ruth Brown discusses the importance of introductions and other practices such as providing spaces for student-to-student online conversations (Brown, 2001, p. 24) in "The Process of Community-Building in Distance Learning Classes" (2001), which point to QM's Course Overview & Introduction and Learner Engagement.

No rubric is necessarily perfect. In her dissertation project *Does Quality Matter: Measuring Whether Online Course Quality Standards are Predictive of Student Satisfaction in Higher Education* (2007), Stacey Clawson¹² states that one of the drawbacks of the QM rubric is that there has not been a lot of research to substantiate the assumption that following these externally published standards of quality will result in higher student satisfaction (Clawson, 2007, p. 1). She cites gaps in the rubric that indicate it is not the medium or structural elements that most affect the online experience (Johnson & Aragon, 2003; Rovai, 2002; Swan, 2003; Twigg, 2000). “Instead, factors such as pedagogy and instructional design are what matter” (Clawson, 2007, p. 29). She goes on to say that “It is crucial that quality standards for online courses include specific criteria for designing activities that require communication or interactivity” (2007, p. 29) and that “the definition for quality should come from professional organizations as well as from the students themselves” (2007, p. 109).

To that end, Clawson acknowledges that a highly effective means of finding whether students are satisfied with the experience of a course is through their qualitative data as provided through student evaluations and ratings (2007, pp. 41-42). This project follows a similar approach since it looks at voluntary viewer response activities. So, her concerns about the rubric will be addressed. The QM rubric is a reasonably effective tool for measuring whether its effectiveness crosses from the educational to entertainment contexts. Also, as I was trained and certified in the QM review process, I have seen university courses’ instructional design improve and I felt it a natural fit in applying components from it to this dissertation.

¹² Clawson currently works for the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and formerly was a professor at Cappella University.

Other Issues: Expectations from the Title and the Store

Another issue could even be with the expectations of the title of the show, considering someone who did not know the series existed might have found it with the search words “Explosion” and “Bus.” This issue was even part of the *Explosion Bus* plot. In *Explosion Bus: Episode 5 "Bus out of Control,"* (which became *EB Origin Story #16*): in the episode, many people discover the “*Talent Explosion*” website (at the same URL as the actual explosionbus.com website), while searching for information about a bomb explosion on a bus that the New York Yankees had just disembarked (“No one was hurt.”). This “mistake” leads to a huge spike in *Explosion Bus*’ website analytic data, making the characters think that *EB* is going to be a lucrative venture. While conceptually a humorous idea, in reality, this approach might have had a negative impact on “findability” and viewership, especially if people had been searching for information about an actual event or tragedy and instead discovered a comedy web series. That however, is just peripheral conjecture at this point.

On the subject of financial revenue, I clicked on the STORE button on the *Explosion Bus* website. Instead of finding merchandise that would promote the show and provide a small revenue stream, the store was completely comprised of jokey items, all of which were offered for free, and included items as:

1. Instructions for creating an origami *Explosion Bus*:

Celebrate the *Explosion Bus* Season Finale like the Japanese do! Pronounced "awr-i-gah-mee," Origami is the ancient art of folding paper. Imported directly from Yokohama, the Finale Origami comes with detailed instructions that have been translated directly from the mouths of wizened masters. Cast aside memories

of frustration, confusion and paper cuts, Finale Origami is both for the beginner and the advanced practitioner. Price: 3 easy payments of \$0.00 Quantity: 300

2. An 8 ½ x 11 “poster” of the *Explosion Bus* with their slogan “We’re nice!”

If you're looking for that one piece to complete your collection, this majestic work of art is for you. Imagine, if you will, placing this beauty beside your Matisse or your Warhol and feeling the joy of a well-diversified collection. Printed on 8.5 X 11, the faded colors of a nearly empty ink cartridge make this item one of a kind. Price: \$0.00 Quantity: 20.

3. Halloween Roulette, which basically would be a 4x6 card that either said the word “Trick” on it, or “Treat:”

If you're above the age of 14, Halloween has probably lost some of its appeal. Sure, you like watching the Halloween episodes of your favorite TV shows and impressing your friends by carving the most avant-garde pumpkin on your block, but other than that, it's just another day. Not anymore. Introducing, for a limited time only, Halloween Roulette. Etymologically similar to Russian Roulette, this dangerous game begins when you click BUY. Nothing will happen right away...that’s the fun part. You will wait a week in total suspense until you receive an envelope containing an index card that reads “TRICK” or “TREAT.” Act now and make this a Halloween to remember. Price: \$0.00 Quantity: 25 (“Explosion Bus Store,” 2011).

There were several more gifts—all comical, all free, to the viewer and postage paid by the *Explosion Bus* team. Again, I thought this might be an approach to compiling viewer data (male/female demographics, geographical hubs of viewers, etc.). I was not sure though, so during

the last chat of the first round of *Explosion Bus* episodes, I offered my assistance to Snyder. As stated earlier, within 10 days, I had already spoken to him on the phone and had lunch with him and his team. It was through those first two conversations that I learned that Snyder had no such agenda and that he was open to some assistance.

Intervention Process: Lining up Design Modifications with Content Provider Objectives (Expectations)

Perhaps due to the concerns mentioned above and other issues, *Explosion Bus* did not readily garner much attention. In fact, the original episodes still had very few viewers several months after their original posting. Since there were objectives the *Explosion Bus* creators had of their viewers, the following is a short list of expectations (objectives) based on my discussions with the team. Original expectations I concluded included that viewers would be able to:

1. Understand that Snyder was conflating practices of traditional versus online viewing by offering online chats following the initial “airing” (posting) of *Explosion Bus*, which was advertised as “Tuesdays at 8:30 P.M.: The Best Timeslot on the Internet.”
2. Participate in the chats every Tuesday evening at 9:00 P.M.
3. Follow the looping timeline of the entire story; that it was a flashback that would end four years in the future.
4. Tell others about the show and the chats.
5. Create audition tapes that could be featured in the series.
6. Vote on which audition tapes would be featured.

Each of these objectives or expectations needed to be communicated to viewers or perhaps modified somehow.

It was during the end of Phase One that Snyder allowed me to provide him with input and suggestions. Utilizing my course review process training, I combed more thoroughly through the rubric standards comparing his webpage and episode content to these standards. My process included the following:

1. On November 4, 2011, I sent an email to Snyder and Covett with questions asking for clarifications regarding the original objectives/intentions of the series.
2. Based on the answers to my questions, I would assess whether the design of the content supported these objectives, and I would compare the eight general Quality Matters rubric standards to the context of *Explosion Bus* and apply them, if germane to both contexts.
3. Lastly, offer Snyder suggestions easiest to implement, but with the greatest impact first.

I determined that five of the rubric's eight general standards applied to Snyder's online entertainment context: (a) Course Overview and Introduction, (b) Learning Objectives, (c) Assessments & Measurements, (d) Resources & Materials and (e) Learner Engagement. As mentioned earlier, on YouTube content providers are not mandated to address issues with course technology, learner support or accessibility. In other words, the content provider does not guide the viewer to the appropriate tools or media support necessary to access the content.

In an entertainment context, if a viewer landed on the website or clicked on a link to one of the *Explosion Bus* episodes, would the viewer understand where the story started? Would the viewer understand what this show was and how it related to Snyder's and Katz's former work? Would a viewer realize she was important in spreading the word about the series and that the creators want the audience to participate in promoting *Explosion Bus*, etc.?

During our lunch in Boston on November 11, 2011, I was given a packet of information that answered several of the questions in my November 4, 2011 email to Snyder and Covett. At our lunch, I suggested the team start:

1. Compiling an email list as a cost-efficient and low-tech way to start contacting fans of all levels directly and alert them to a target date for season two's launch.
2. With email blasts, recipients should be blind copied to maintain confidentiality (they had not been doing this before).
3. Adding additional content in the *Explosion Bus* closing credits and a voice over (VO) with further information/announcement/requests might make expectations clearer to viewers.
4. Cross-pollenating as many social media hubs as possible, although if *Explosion Bus* was not going to be adding content regularly, this could frustrate viewers.
5. Giving viewers a way to get involved.

Analytic/Quantitative Data for Phase One

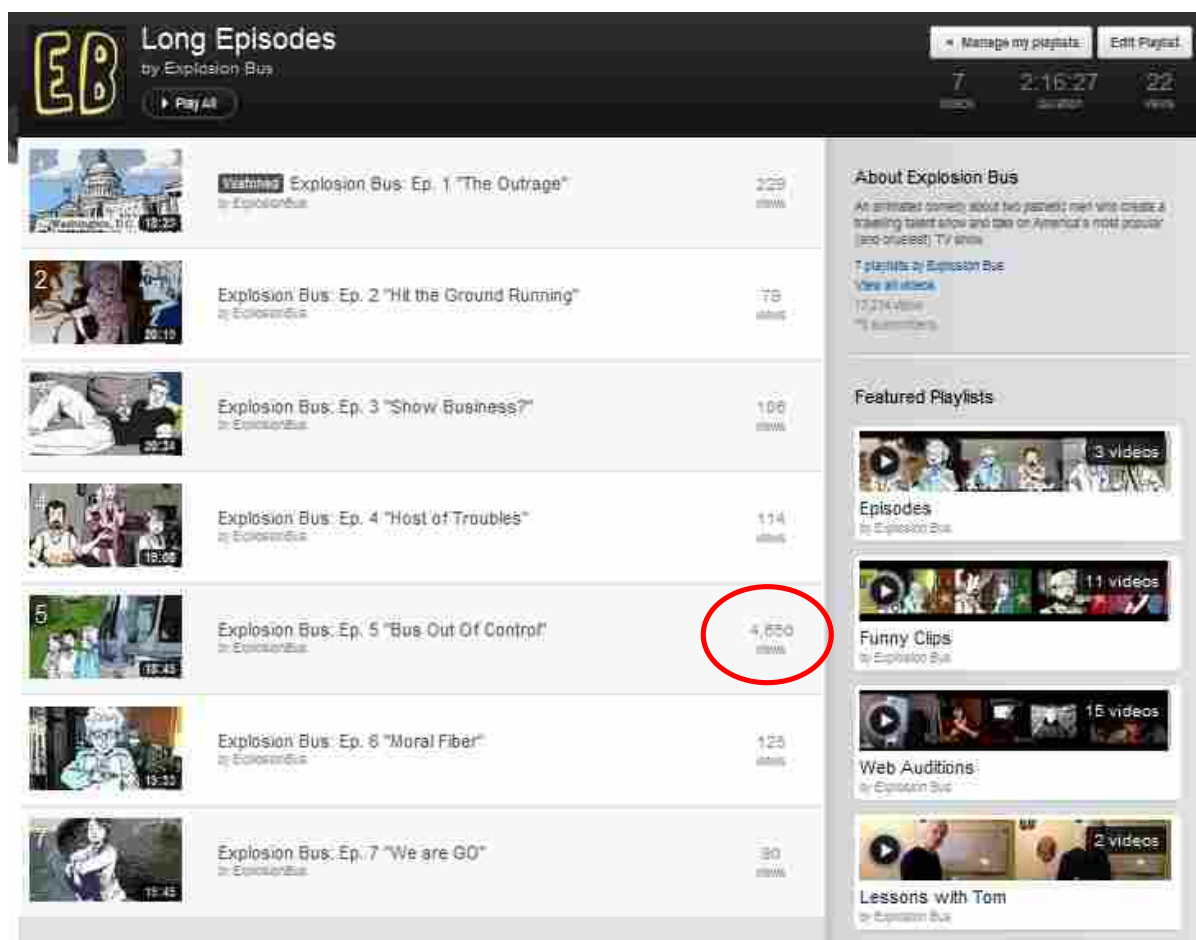


Fig. 3. Phase One videos and number of views as of March 2012. Screenshot by author.

The seven original longer episodes were posted on Tuesday evenings with synchronous chats to follow from 9-10 P.M. As mentioned, the chats did not attract many participants. There were signs of viewers visiting the webpage, however, and according to the ExplosionBus.com analytics provided by Google.com, there had been 13,131 visits to the ExplosionBus.com home page as of December 2, 2011.¹³

¹³ December 2 was 30 days after the last long episode was posted and before any suggestions had been implemented.

Table 10. Analytic Data for All Phase One Videos.

No.	Original Episodes (date posted)	Views	Likes	Dislikes ¹⁴	Subscribers	Comments
1.	<i>Explosion Bus</i> : Ep. 1 "The Outrage" (September 12, 2011)	229	-	-	5	Disabled ¹⁵
2.	<i>Explosion Bus</i> : Ep. 2: "Hitting the Ground Running" (September 19, 2011)	79	2	1	1	Disabled
3.	<i>Explosion Bus</i> : Ep. 3 "Show Business?" (September 26, 2011)	106	-	-	1	Disabled
4.	<i>Explosion Bus</i> : Ep. 4 "Host of Troubles" (October 4, 2011)	116	5	-	-	Disabled
5.	<i>Explosion Bus</i> : Ep. 5 "Bus out of Control" (October 11, 2011)	4650	5	-	2	Disabled
6.	<i>Explosion Bus</i> : Ep. 6 "Moral Fiber" (October 18, 2011)	125	1	-	3	Disabled
7.	<i>Explosion Bus</i> : Ep. 7 "We are GO" (November 2, 2011)	90	4	-	-	Disabled

The total number of views for all seven episodes was 5,395. However, the average number of views of *Explosion Bus* videos, even after the first six months of posting, was merely 125 per episode, if the fifth episode is removed from the average. This episode, entitled

¹⁴ There were no shares during Phase One, so I have omitted that column here.

¹⁵ Another gap of data is in the comments of these first seven episodes. The analytics say that there were two comments made regarding episode three, and one comment made for episode six, but as the longer videos were pulled after the shorter episodes were posted, the comments for the original seven episodes were "disabled" and all written comments are still unavailable. I had no access to these pages until much later.

Explosion Bus Episode 5: “Bus Out of Control,” featured a singer named Mary Bee, and had 4,650 of the 5,395 views by March 10, 2012. Originally, I suspected Mary Bee and her fan base had something to do with those numbers. Indeed, Mary Bee had posted the episode from her website (marybeemusic.com), but the data did not necessarily line up with viewers being directed from that site.

Since the viewing numbers for the other six episodes are obviously not very high, the anomaly of episode five is intriguing. According to the YouTube Analytics data sheet, 1,817 views (1,352+425+32+8)¹⁶ were from YouTube-related searches or channels. A total of 1,732 views came from an external URL, such as ExplosionBus.com and/or marybeemusic.com. The rest came from “direct or unknown” sources. These findings are interpreted in chapter five.

<input type="checkbox"/> Traffic source	Watch time (minutes)*	Views	Average view duration*	Average percentage viewed*
<input type="checkbox"/> Direct or unknown	0 (0.0%)	1,370 (28%)	n/a	n/a
<input type="checkbox"/> YouTube channels	0 (0.0%)	8 (0.2%)	n/a	n/a
<input type="checkbox"/> YouTube search	0 (0.0%)	1,352 (27%)	n/a	n/a
<input type="checkbox"/> Google search	0 (0.0%)	8 (0.2%)	n/a	n/a
<input type="checkbox"/> Suggested videos	0 (0.0%)	425 (8.6%)	n/a	n/a
<input type="checkbox"/> Other YouTube features	0 (0.0%)	32 (0.6%)	n/a	n/a
<input type="checkbox"/> External	0 (0.0%)	1,732 (35%)	n/a	n/a
<input type="checkbox"/> Unknown – embedded player	0 (0.0%)	1 (0.0%)	n/a	n/a

Fig. 4. Top sources of viewers for *Explosion Bus: Episode 5 “Bus Out of Control.”* Screenshot by author.

¹⁶ See chart below.

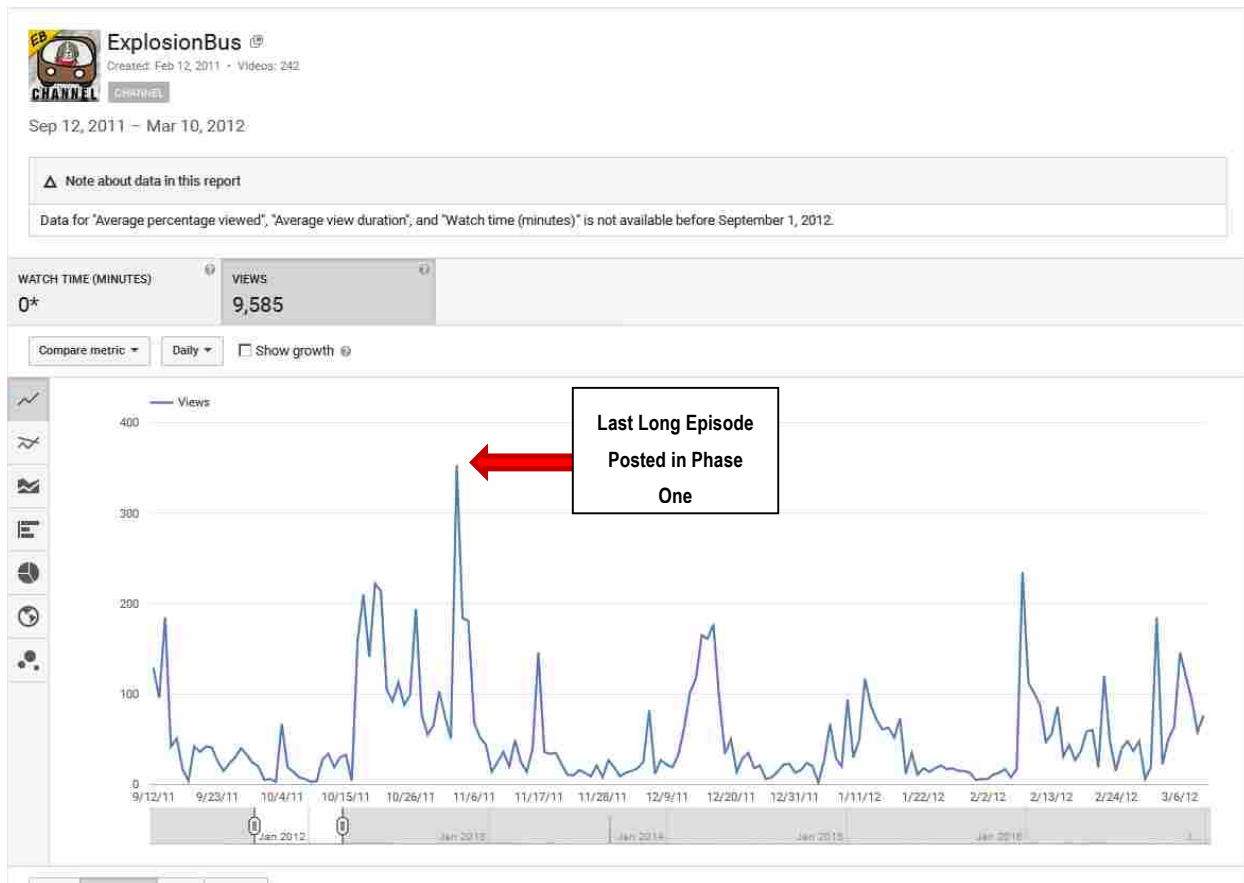


Fig. 5. Overall patterns of viewers through Phase One. Screenshot by author.

Qualitative Data/Coding for Phase One

Unfortunately, comments on the first seven episodes were disabled and older comments deleted, so there is no qualitative data available for them. The quantitative data on the other Phase One videos (clips, cast auditions) posted after the last *Explosion Bus* episode (November 2, 2011) reveal that there had been 25 comments across the 25 shorter videos posted after December 12, 2011. Eight comments were made by *Explosion Bus* team members. There were six positive comments and no negative comments. There had been some discussion about *Home Movies*, another of Snyder's productions, and that accounts for the 11 neutral comments.

Table 11. Phase One Comments and Nuanced Codes.

Latter Phase 1 Comments	Overall Number of Comments	Positive Subcodes	Neutral Subcodes	Negative Subcodes
Videos posted Dec 12, 2011– March 11, 2012		IntensPos	-Query -Joke -U	-CC -Troll
32# of EB Channel Videos	7 episodes +11 clips +13 auditions + 1 Snyder “Press Conference” = 32			
Comments¹⁷	25	-	-	-
≤5 wd. Neg	-	-	-	-
>5 wd. Neg	-	-	-	-
≤5 wd. Neut	1	-	-	-
>5 wd. Neut	10	-	3-Query 1-Joke 4-U	-
≤5 wd. Pos	2	3 IntensPos	-	-
>5 wd. Pos	4	-	-	-
EB/Team Comments	8	-	-	-

Data from the synchronous chats are incomplete, as I had no way to triangulate the identities of the participants with analytic data in the chat software. The webmaster at the time left the *EB* team during Phase Two, making access to analytics and chat transcription impossible. However, I personally had been able to save four chat transcriptions from September 20, 2011 to October 18, 2011. Further complications with the chats included that Snyder was not utilizing these discussions as a focus group nor for opinion mining. Although the number of participants was small, it is impossible to get an absolutely precise number of outside (non-*EB* team)

¹⁷ Comment data come from the extra clips. Comments from the episodes had been disabled.

participants for two reasons: (a) the chat software was very simply designed and participants (and *EB* team members) often played with a flaw in the chat's design, which allowed users to replicate that they were no longer in the chat merely by typing "left" or "joined" next to their name. So, if the chat read that "User1: left," or "User1: joined," it could mean that they either left or joined the chatroom, or merely typed the words "left" or "joined" as part of the chat; (b) user accounts were not required to join these chats so users were able to change their identifications without leaving or joining the discussion, so it became rather confusing to know how many distinct users were actually in the chat.

However, I am including an estimated number of participants merely to show that the discussions were not popular. Each week there were approximately five *Explosion Bus* team members in the chats (generally including Snyder, Covett, Katz and Leopold) and a few friends or *EB* team family members. During the September 20, 2011 chat, it was noted that there had been 11 participants the previous week (who I missed) and I am not sure if that included or excluded the five *EB* team members. For the chat on the 20th, it appeared only six non-*EB* team users joined. On September 27, there were six *EB* team members, but several participants were playing with the "joined," "left" flaw. Overall, there had been 26 users who claimed they "joined" and 17 claimed they "left." On October 4, 19 "joined," and 16 "left." On October 18, approximately half of the data was lost as the chat unexpectedly crashed and participants had to rejoin at 9:26 P.M. From that point on, 12 people joined and five of them were *EB* team members. Synchronous chats were ultimately phased out after the last Phase One episode was posted on November 2, 2011.

On the *Explosion Bus* website there had been a page called "Talk," which included Tony Lovell's reviews of each episode, with an invitation to viewers to comment below each review.

Commenting required a login through Disqus and by December 9, 2011, the total numbers of comments for each of the seven episodes were five, nine, nine, four, five, two and one, respectively. All of the comments were positive and some names were familiar from the synchronous chats.

Qualitative Analysis and Initial Suggestions

I was not aware of *Explosion Bus* during Phase Zero, having only discovered the series during Phase One, after the second episode had been posted. As an outside viewer of *Explosion Bus*, the low number participants in the synchronous chats surprised me, as well as the low number of views on YouTube videos. This seemed odd as I could also see from Jon Katz's Facebook and Twitter accounts that he had many followers. Katz had approximately 11,000 Twitter followers and 4,000 Facebook friends at the time¹⁸. It was due to these low numbers that I approached Snyder in the first place.

As mentioned in chapter four, it was at the end of the last chat for the last episode (November 2, 2011) that I contacted Snyder and, a little over a week later, we arranged for me to offer new media input in exchange for his willingness to be a case study. Between my online course review training and readings from Henry Jenkins, I had suspected that Snyder's content was too long and too complicated to draw in viewers. The circular narrative might have been difficult for viewers new to Snyder, Katz or Leopold, so I suggested that more viewers might be drawn in with content that was shorter and more traditionally organized.¹⁹In our meeting on

¹⁸ I noted these numbers when Katz friended me on both sites.

¹⁹ I understand this is not in keeping with Snyder's original vision or goals for this show. However, the goal at the time was to get more viewers, and this might be done in a two-step process—first attract viewers, then move back into the longer format.

November 11 and in two emails,²⁰ I made the following suggestions based on the issues mentioned in chapter four regarding “navigation, objectives, sequencing and time:”

1. Break the content into smaller chunks.
2. Make each video more self-contained (“make it about one thing”).
3. Express *EB*’s expectations (objectives) of the viewers:
 - a. Tell people to subscribe to the *Explosion Bus* email list for further updates.
 - b. Ask for contestants to send a link to their audio/video talent.
 - c. Ask people to tell others about the show.
 - d. Ask people to visit the store (and explaining that a little better, perhaps).
 - e. Tell people to "save the date" for season two's launch.
4. Release extra material before the show starts up again.²¹
5. Make the website easier to navigate for the user.
6. Tell the viewers to look out for updates on the website. (Cooke, personal

communication, November 16, 2011)

On December 7, 2011, Covett sent an email explaining the changes to a group of *Explosion Bus* insiders:

It's taken long enough, but finally we've finished a first draft of a slightly modified site.

These were some of our goals for the site (especially the Home Page):

1. Make it easier for newcomers to understand what *EB* is, both in terms of what the show's about and what kind of entertainment they can expect
2. Provide "on-the-go" busy web surfers with shorter videos in smaller dosages that will hopefully tempt them into watching the full 20 minute episodes

²⁰ Dated November 16 and December 7, 2011.

²¹ Keeping new material posted on the channel and webpage would create an expectation in viewers to visit the page often and that they could rely on the *EB* team to continue providing content and be available.

3. Offer people more ways to get involved, participate and interact
4. Try to increase the time people spend on the site
5. Do all of the above while maintaining the simplicity and quirkiness of the original design. (Covett, personal communication, December 7, 2011)

The following list summarizes how my suggestions fit in with the general standards of the Quality Matters rubric:

- Course Overview and Introduction
 - Make the website easier to navigate for the user.
 - Break the video content into smaller chunks.
- Learning Objectives
 - Make each video more self-contained.
 - Express *EB*'s expectations (objectives) of the viewers:
 - Ask people to tell others about the show.
 - Ask people to visit the store.
- Tell people to "save the date" for season two's launch (their next round of episodes).
- Assessments & Measurements/Resources & Materials
 - Tell people to subscribe to the *Explosion Bus* email list for further updates.
 - Ask for "contestants" for the *Talent Explosion* contest, having them send in web auditions people could vote for.
- Learner Engagement
 - Release extra material before the show starts up again.
 - Tell the viewers to look out for updates on the website.

If the above issues were addressed, they would proactively answer questions viewers would have upon discovering *Explosion Bus* content.

Once I was given access to the analytic data for the *Explosion Bus* website, I was able to see that 470 visits to the site came from Jonathan Katz's and Tom Leopold's personal websites and 2,097 came from Facebook referrals. An impressive 4,906 visitors came from no referral, but had entered the explosionbus.com address directly. Almost as impressive was the amount of visitors who came from stumbleupon.com, a search engine that customizes searches to user preferences. However, although the total number of Stumbleupon referrals was 3,190 (3,130 + 60), unfortunately those visits had a high "bounce rate" (number of visitors who landed on only one page and left with no further browsing), showing a quick departure from the webpage and an average duration of the visit of less than 12 seconds. The longest time on the page was understandably from viewers who had searched specifically for Explosionbus.com via Google.com.

Table 12. Top 10 Source Locations during Phase One.

No.	Top 10 Sources of <i>Explosion Bus</i> Visits (as of December 2, 2011)	Pages Visited	Average Visit Duration (in minutes)	Visits	New Visits	Bounce Rate
1.	(direct) / (none)	2.24	00:02:45	4,906	78.23%	52.43%
2.	stumbleupon.com / referral	1.06	00:00:12	3,130	99.65%	75.05%
3.	facebook.com / referral	2.51	00:02:47	2,097	56.94%	58.23%
4.	google / organic	3.89	00:05:38	1,207	36.37%	37.12%
5.	jonathankatz.com / referral	2.64	00:03:11	470	40.43%	58.51%
6.	t.co / referral	2.65	00:03:00	398	58.29%	60.55%
7.	tomleopold.net / referral	4.77	00:08:12	129	10.08%	51.16%
8.	m.facebook.com / referral	2.44	00:02:33	115	59.13%	58.26%
9.	dailyfreepress.com / referral	2.00	00:01:53	101	41.58%	74.26%
10.	wwwstumbleupon.com / referral	1.02	00:00:00	60	98.33%	98.33%

Start of Implemented Suggestions

The suggestions made regarding the webpage and episodes were worked on during the rest of Phase One, and publicly posted starting March 11, 2012, the beginning of Phase Two. Therefore, a fuller analysis of these changes will be made in the section on Phase Two. However, the *Explosion Bus* team did implement several suggestions in the latter half of Phase One. Although they did not have new episodes ready immediately after the first seven were posted, as mentioned earlier, the *EB* team posted 21 shorter, self-contained pieces in the latter part of Phase One, comprised of auditions of “*Talent Explosion*” contestants featured in the show,²² auditions of cast members, and short (<1 min) clips from the first episodes. These videos were posted at regular intervals between December 12, 2011 and March 6, 2012, and kept viewers coming to

²² The auditions from this period were of “*Talent Explosion*” contestants who were part of the *Explosion Bus* plot. The web auditions that would come later would be created by *EB* viewers and would be edited into the beginning of each new episode, but did not interact with the characters or plotline.

the *Explosion Bus* channel. On the webpage, there was a countdown alerting the viewer of the date the next episode (the start of Phase Two in this study) would be posted.

None of the first seven episodes contained annotations for subscribing or viewing other *EB* channel material until February 22, 2012. Each of the video descriptions explained what *Explosion Bus* was about, its association with Katz, Leopold, Snyder and *Dr. Katz: Professional Therapist*, and directed the viewer to Explosionbus.com. The first video to feature a “subscribe” annotation was “*Explosion Bus Clip: Elementary School Scandal*,” and resulted in an additional 15 subscribers through that one video.

The low number of comments in the Talk section of the *Explosion Bus* webpage could have been due to two factors: (a) a login was required, so anonymous comments could not be made and (b) the page title of “Talk” might not have made it clear that this was where viewers could go to see reviews of the episodes and leave comments. This title was changed in Phase Two upon my recommendation.

Table 13. Overall Tally of *Explosion Bus* Activities during Phase One.

Activities	Phase 1
EB page visitors	10,756 ²³
EB page views	33,880
# of EB YouTube videos	7 episodes +19 shorts+ 6 auditions = 32
YouTube views/clicks	7,494 (5,696 episodes) ²⁴
Videos with zero comments	6 clips+ 4 cast auditions+3 web auditions= 13
<50% episode viewed	*
>50% episode viewed	*
Average % of episode viewed	*
Shared	8
Annotation clicks	-
Disliked	9
Liked	68
Subscribed	44
Comments²⁵	25 ²⁶
<5 wd. Neg	-
>5 wd. Neg	-
-Constructive	-
-Troll	-
<5 wd. Neut	1
>5 wd. Neut	10
-Joke	1
-Query	3
-Understand	4
<5 wd. Pos	2
>5 wd. Pos	4
IntensPos	3
EB/team comments	8
Audition	5
Spin-off	-
Recap	-
Extra series	-

²³ Phase 1 Google Analytics, from September 12, 2011-March 11, 2012. Google Analytics also shows an average session duration of 2:29 minutes, and a bounce rate of 58.75 percent.

²⁴ Episodes-5,695, web auditions-666, EB clips + TS lectures, etc-1,133= 7,494.

²⁵ Comments= total number of individual comments. These do not include comments by EB team members. Comments that depict higher levels of interest are included in the total number of comments, but also counted separately.

²⁶ Comment data come from the extra clips. Comments from the episodes had been disabled.

Lessons Learned During Phase One

Snyder recalls the most impactful advice was to make the episodes shorter and more self-contained (“Make it about one thing”) (Cooke & Snyder, 2016). The way to minimize the preparation confused viewers needed to contextualize the *Explosion Bus* story could be offset by removing the circular flashback/flash-forward narrative. This idea had also been in line with Henry Jenkins’ *Spreadable Media* (2013). An online video typically spreads more quickly when content is free standing and easy to get in and out of—a form of “Video Snacks” (Jenkins, 2013, p. 135). Of course, this suggestion completely defeated the purpose of Snyder’s overall five-year, complicated storyline. However, my initial input merely pointed out what might be interfering with series viewership.

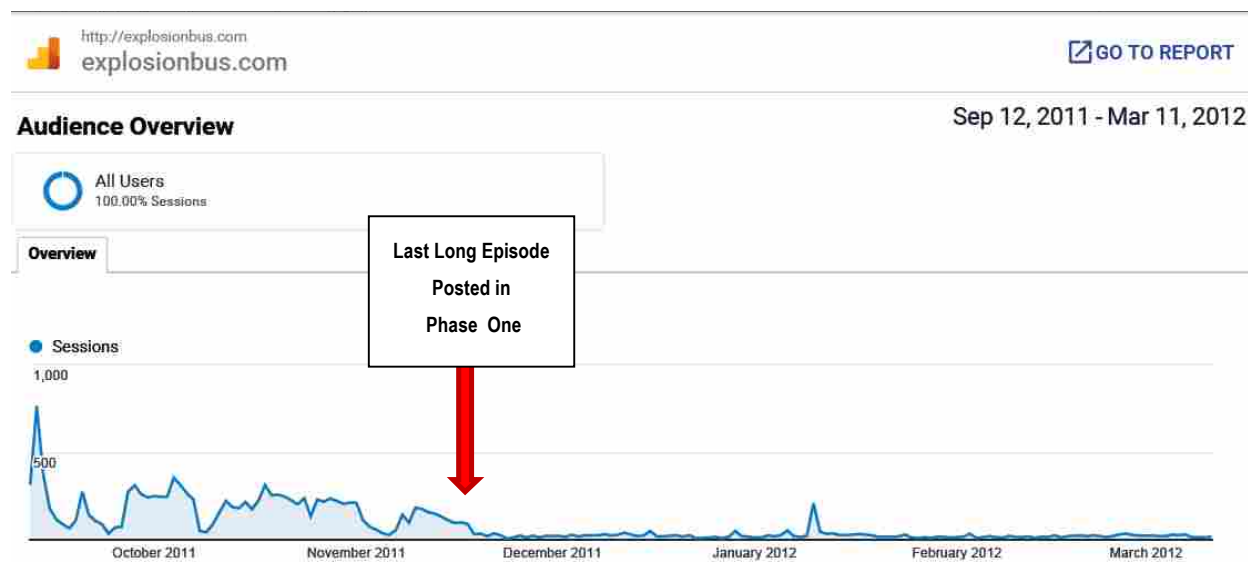


Fig. 6. Overall patterns of ExplosionBus.com visitors through Phase One. Screenshot by author.

Covett remembers the suggestions of making the webpage navigation more user friendly and for the team to communicate expectations to the audience (Cooke & Covett, 2016). I also suggested they offer a way for viewers to participate in the “grassroots” component of the

show—offer a sort of weekly amateur contest to viewers who wanted to “audition” for *Explosion Bus*. In other words, a weekly contest might offer Snyder and Covett a more direct method of assessing viewership.

In research, “context is everything” (Dent, 2013). For a content provider, interest or exposure does not necessarily mean a quantifiable behavior can be correlated to it. Interest does not necessarily indicate a high level of engagement such as a behavioral change; certain people will see an expensive item and buy it, and others may find the item interesting, yet financially unobtainable. Although the series is offered to the viewer for free, initial interest in *Explosion Bus* (clicking a link) does count as a financially quantifiable behavior, because in the early weeks of the series, advertisements were placed in the YouTube video; each viewing sent a small commission to Snyder. The more views, the more advertisements were seen, and the more revenue was sent to Snyder’s team. However, Snyder and Covett began to wonder if this would become a barrier to the viewers they were hoping to attract. So, after the first seven videos were posted, Snyder decided to disable the advertising commissions on YouTube. Since the synchronous chats did not grow during the seven weeks they were offered, the chats were no longer to be a part of the *Explosion Bus* experience.

Before Phase Two episodes were posted, Snyder spent the latter part of Phase One cutting each of the seven original episodes into three smaller ones (approximately five to eight minutes long), and created an instructional video on how to audition for *Explosion Bus*.²⁷ Instead of going into a dormant hiatus on the YouTube *Explosion Bus* channel, Snyder and Covett continued to post content during this interim period. Covett posted various audition videos of *Talent Explosion* contestants, clips from the longer *EB* episodes (approximately one minute each

²⁷ *Explosion Bus: Send Us Your Audition!* Published on March 12, 2012. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pe7gGVs-Rrk>

in length) and live-action comedic lectures featuring Tom Snyder himself.²⁸ The first auditions were posted on December 12, 2011. Once the episodes were completed, they would be posted weekly beginning March 12, 2012. Most of the shorter Phase One videos posted at this time mentioned the explosionbus.com website in their descriptions (although six auditions did not) and, initially, viewers continued to visit the *Explosion Bus* website.

On March 6, 2012, Tom Snyder posted a brief YouTube video to *Explosion Bus* “friends” (which he later opened to the public) called *Tom Snyder: Press Conference to Stakeholders*.²⁹ In one minute and 48 seconds, he updates the team that season two is in production and it will be comprised of five-minute episodes since “People on the Internet like short things.” He thought they enjoyed longer content, but “They don’t.” He announced that these modifications would appear on March 13, 2012. That is the date that begins Phase Two.

PHASE TWO: MARCH 11, 2012—SEPTEMBER 16, 2012

The Assumptions, “The Work” and the Output

It was during Phase Two that the shorter, more self-contained episodes were posted. Snyder dropped the synchronous chats as he was not comfortable with using them for self-promotion. With Snyder’s being busy on the development side, he typically did not explore online practices. Snyder was willing to listen to ideas, though, and agreed to change things as information came in. During Phase Two, the team wanted to create a lot more content, so Covett was tasked with scouting for co-contributors, which led her to reach out directly to *EB* subscribers on the YouTube channel. Covett likened it to being the “director of this alternative

²⁸ Drawing from his teaching experience, Snyder performed as a rambling instructor of a bogus “Advanced Writing” course. I believe these lectures came from a suggestion I had made in my January 8, 2012 email stating that Snyder promote himself as an innovator and “be more central in the conversations.” True to Snyder’s discomfort with self-promotion, this was the result.

²⁹ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ARITNDI9cCQ>

Explosion Bus universe that we were trying to fill content with” (Covett, 2016). In this second phase, whatever Snyder needed to be done, Covett did it. As a result, Covett’s production experience and work expanded.

Phase Two: Webpage Design

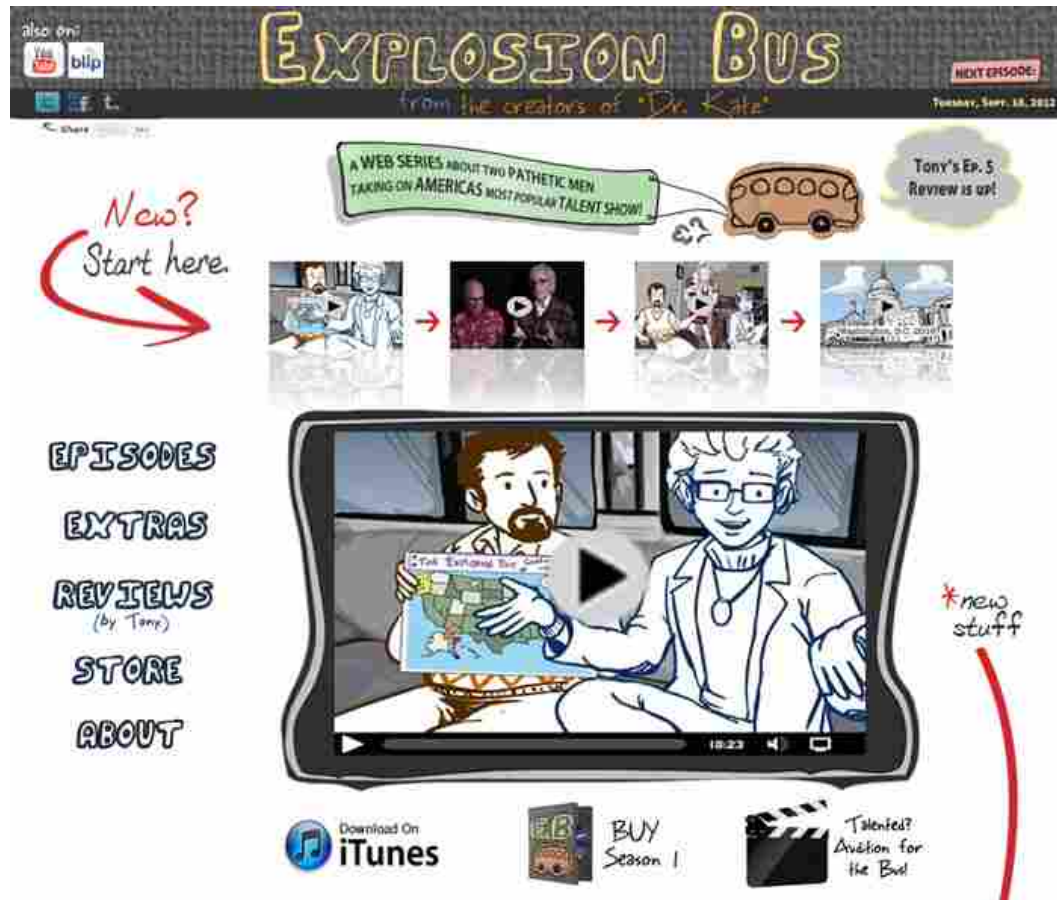


Fig. 7. Phase Two version of *Explosion Bus* website (top half). Screenshot by author.

Immediately, the eye is drawn to the red arrows that show clear navigation. If the user is new to *EB*, they should click on the first episode. If not, they can click on the video in the television graphic to watch the most current episodes.

At the top of the main white area, the page is more clearly explained: “A WEB SERIES about two PATHETIC MEN taking on AMERICA’S most popular TALENT SHOW!” On the right side of a little bus at the top of the screen, are the words “New Episode Every Tuesday!” Above this graphic, in the header area, we also see the date of the next episode instead of a countdown.

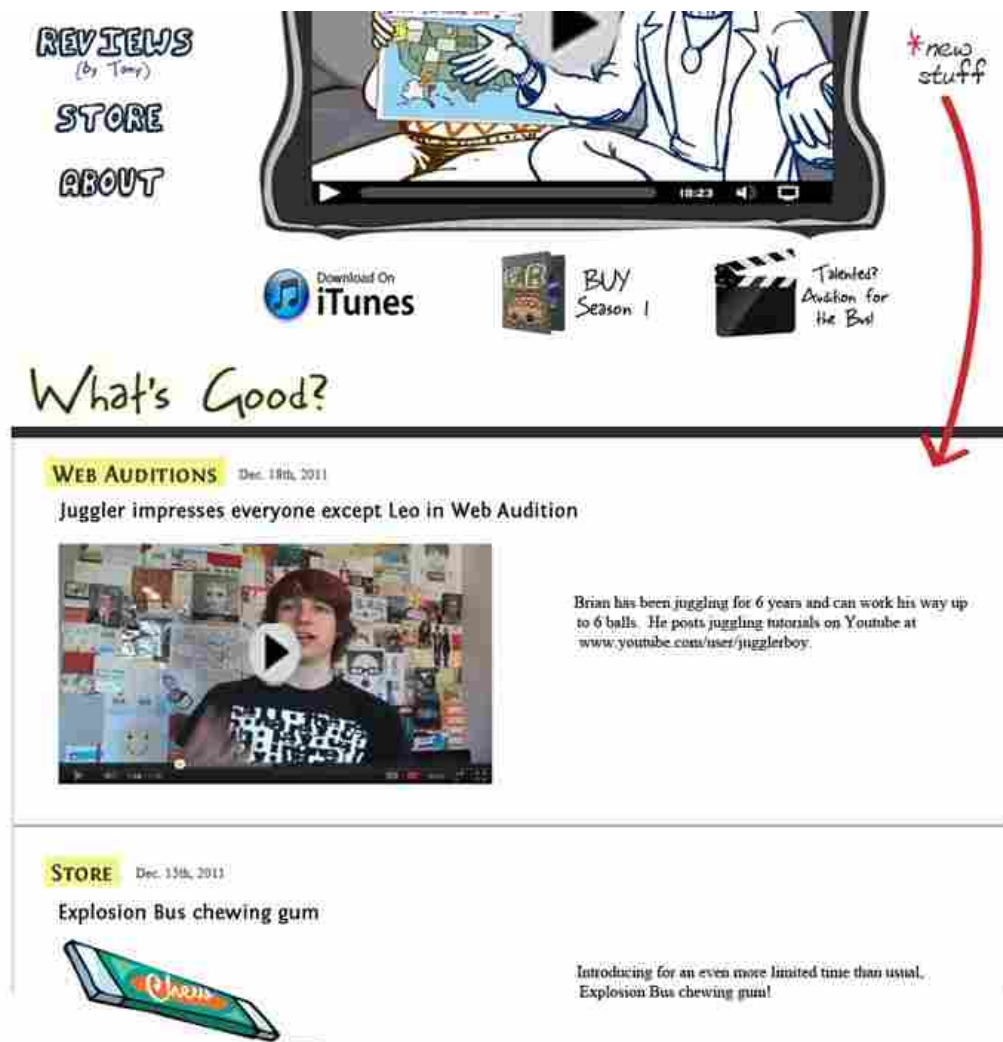


Fig. 8. Phase Two version of *Explosion Bus* website (bottom half). Screenshot by author.

Content should be clearly marked and explained. Therefore, because “TALK” was a misleading name, and not a forum where viewers could initiate threads of conversation, “TALK” page was replaced by “REVIEWS (by Tony),” clarifying that option.

In the lower right quadrant of the main content area, “*New Stuff” and another red arrow draw the visitor down the page, alerting the user to more content below in a section called “What’s Good?” It is here where the audience is invited to be involved more—viewers are to post audition videos for the series’ fictional contest “The Traveling *Talent Explosion*” and their video might get featured in an upcoming *Explosion Bus* episode. There is also a section for a comical (free) item featured from the *EB* Store. Most of the items in the store remained free. A couple of new offerings included the entire original *Explosion Bus* first seven episodes on a DVD or via iTunes. The DVDs were the only items offered for a fee.

Phase Two: Episode Format

Regarding the format of the *Explosion Bus* episodes themselves, several key changes were made:

1. To inspire a bit of interaction between the content providers and the viewers, each new episode now began with a brief moment from the “audition” video from a viewer who had posted their video to YouTube. Each video began with the performer’s name and the words “This is my audition for *Explosion Bus*.” The audition only played for a few seconds before going to opening credits.
2. To better identify the creators of the show, the opening credits identified the voices of each regular character, starting with Jonathan Katz and Tom Leopold and ending with “Created by Tom Snyder.”
3. A “Subscribe” button (annotation) was featured on the lower right of the screen during the open credits.

4. To make the show a quicker and easily sharable experience, each of the original approximately 20-minute episodes were cut into three, and re-released as shorter five to seven minute episodes.
5. During the end credits, promotions for other *Explosion Bus* episodes and other videos created by the team were announced in a voiceover.
6. At the end of each show were links (annotations) to other episodes—since the team already had the first seven shows cut into 21 separate shorter episodes, these were ready.
7. An animated, oversized cursor arrow appeared to show where viewers should click to find these videos.

The *Explosion Bus* team also posted several videos related to the *Explosion Bus* universe, but not part of the story. If there were expectations of the viewers, they had to be clearly explained. So the team requested viewers “audition” to become part of the series via additional instructional videos. These explained the format of the videos, how to upload them and how to get their video into the next *Explosion Bus* episode. Viewers were also instructed on the voting procedure: each view was counted as a vote on two audition videos each week. The audition with the most votes would be featured at the beginning of the next *EB* episode.



Fig. 9. *Explosion Bus: Send Us Your Audition!* video (2012), explaining how to upload audition video to YouTube. Screenshot by author.

Each of these episode changes made navigation clearer and expressed the creators' expectations: they were hoping viewers would watch the series, subscribe to their *EB* YouTube channel, send in audition videos and click on other *Explosion Bus* videos. The viewers were also directed to the proper order to view episodes.

Analytic/Quantitative Data for Phase Two

This is the overall viewership of all Phase Two *Explosion Bus* episodes posted between March 11 and July 30, as of Sept 16, 2012:³⁰

³⁰ The number of videos grew a lot during Phases Two, Three and Four. The data for those three phases are in the Appendices (I-M). To facilitate reading, I have only included tables that demonstrate the pertinent finding being cited in this chapter.

Table 14. Phase Two Viewing Habits. Seven Phase One Videos Divided into 21 “EB. Origin Story” videos in Phase Two.

<i>EB</i> Titles	Video Length (minutes)	Average % of Video Viewed ³¹	Views	Minutes Watched
EB Origin Story #1	6.02	53.74	3015	543
EB Origin Story #2	5.78	71.5	683	178
EB Origin Story #3	5.82	81.55	583	109
EB Origin Story #4	5.27	78.95	633	91
EB Origin Story #5	4.77	87.64	589	84
EB Origin Story #6	5.05	82.47	598	71
EB Origin Story #7	5.33	79.1	404	63
EB Origin Story #8	5.57	84.93	393	71
EB Origin Story #9	7.23	80.55	551	111
EB Origin Story #10	7.63	78.09	394	131
EB Origin Story #11	6.98	75.22	502	110
EB Origin Story #12	6.85	66.84	432	96
EB Origin Story #13	7.88	54.13	323	94
EB Origin Story #14	5.57	64.13	299	61
EB Origin Story #15	7.45	78.09	275	81
EB Origin Story #16	8.60	63.37	304	109
EB Origin Story #17	7.88	71.73	298	96
EB Origin Story #18	7.00	69.86	377	83
EB Origin Story #19	8.57	51.7	318	93
EB Origin Story #20	10.00	45.72	389	146
EB Origin Story #21	9.12	42.88	353	188

Assessment: Longer to Shorter Episodes

In assessing whether my suggestion to shorten the episodes was effective, it had been my desire to compare the percentages of each longer and shorter video viewed. Unfortunately, the percentages for the longer episode views were not available in Google’s analytic data. Shortly after Phase Two began, Phase One episodes were hidden from the public and comments had also been disabled. I, therefore, cannot assert that the average viewing percentages for each of the shorter episodes were definitely higher than the longer episodes. However, I believe it to be the

³¹ Totals are as of September 16, 2012.

case since the average views for each of the 21 shorter episodes had view durations of 64.35 percent and the number of viewers for each of the shorter episodes was substantially higher than the original seven.³²

I am able to compare other measurable responses such as views, subscribers, likes and annotation clicks. Since *Origin Story #1, #2, and #3* (2012), originally came from the longer first *Explosion Bus* episode (*Episode 1: "The Outrage"*) (2011), I am comparing the average number of the three shorter episodes to the 229 views the original Phase One episode received over a six-month period. The first shorter Phase Two episode had 7,701 viewers (see table below), the second, 2,536 and the third 1,818, totaling 12,055. Divide this total by three to get the average and it totals 4,018, which when divided by the original 229 views, shows a viewership of 1,755 percent of the original—an increase of 1,655 percent within a six-month period. It appears that over 17 times more people viewed the shorter content than the longer content. Even the shorter episodes with the fewest views had a larger viewership than the corresponding longer episode—for instance, *Explosion Bus: Episode 7 "We are GO,"* (2011) had 92 views. However, *Origin Story #19, #20 and #21* (2012), the three episodes that had originally comprised episode seven, averaged 967.66 viewers ($888 + 1036 + 979 = 2,903 \div 3$)—1,051 percent of the original viewership within a similar time period of six months.

Based on the available analytic data, there were no shares of the first seven episodes. However, the total number of shares across the 21 shorter episodes was 16. It would appear that more people were motivated to share the shorter content than with the longer format episodes.

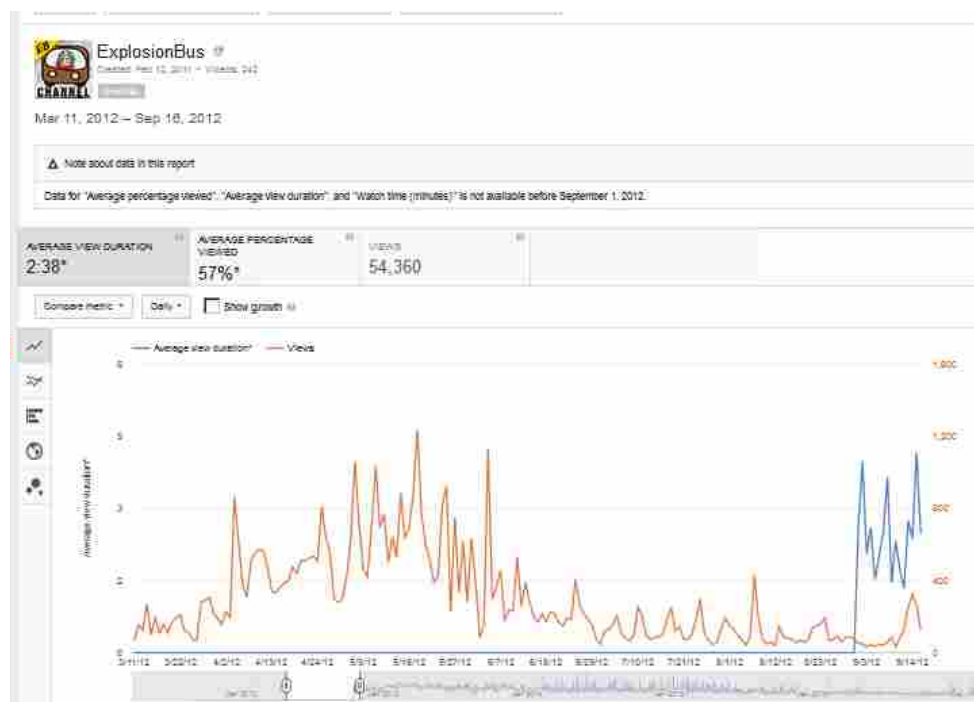
³² Taking the averages of the 21 shorter episodes and adding them back into the seven longer episodes will result in each episode's view duration totaling 61.1 percent, 66.64 percent, 68.97 percent, 62.95 percent, 68.92 percent, 63.24 percent and 58.68 percent, respectively.

Table 15. Analytic Data for All Phase One *Explosion Bus* Episodes (16 Sept 2012).

No.	Views (long)	Views (3 short episodes)	Subscribers (long)	Subscribers (3 short episodes)	Likes (long)	Likes (3 short episodes)	Annotation Clicks (3 short episodes)	Increase ?
1.	229	7,701 + 2,536 + 1,818 = 12,055	5	84+ 17+ 5 = 106	1	51+25+17 = 93	80+65+62 = 207	✓
2.	79	1,650+ 1,681+ 1,537 = 868	1	12+ 12+ 5 = 29	3	10+15+13 = 38	42+38+41 = 121	✓
3.	106	1,217+ 1,189+ 1,351 = 3,757	1	5+ 2+ 3 = 10	1	10+12+12 = 34	32+5+23 = 60	✓
4.	116	1,144+ 1,346+ 1,166 = 3,656	-	5+ 5+ 2 = 12	1	13+16+9 = 38	31+29+42 = 102	✓
5.	4629	943+ 918+ 908 = 2,769	2	1+ 0 + 5 = 6	5	7+9+10= 26	28+37+30 = 95	✓
6.	128	974+ 842+ 1,037 = 2,853	3	3+ 1+ 5 = 9	1	7+5+14= 26	10+24+7 =41	✓
7.	92	888 + 1,036+ 979 = 2,903	-	1+ 0+ 2 = 3	4	7+6+12 = 25	4+3+3 = 10	✓

Table 16. Top 10 *Explosion Bus* episodes in Phase Two.

No.	Top 10 <i>EB</i> Episodes Only (date posted)	Length	Average Percent View Time	Views
1.	EB Origin Story #1 (3/11/12)	6.02	53.74	3015
2.	EB Origin Story #2 (3/19/12)	5.78	71.5	683
3.	EB Origin Story #4 (4/2/12)	5.27	78.95	633
4.	EB Origin Story #6 (4/16/12)	5.05	82.47	598
5.	EB Origin Story #5 (4/7/12)	4.77	87.64	589
6.	EB Origin Story #3 (3/27/12)	5.82	81.55	583
7.	EB Origin Story #9 (5/7/12)	7.23	80.55	551
8.	EB Origin Story #11 (5/22/12)	6.98	75.22	502
9.	EB Origin Story #12 (5/28/12)	6.85	66.84	432
10.	EB Origin Story #7 (4/23/12)	5.33	79.1	404

**Fig. 10.** Phase Two Viewing Activity (in brown) decreasing after web auditions were no longer solicited. “Duration” data was not available until September 2012. Screenshot by author.

The data show more viewers in a shorter period of time than in Phases Zero and One, but this will be covered more in the analysis section of Phase Two (p. 190) and the overall conclusions of this chapter (p. 193).

Assessment: Serial Episodes to Self-Contained, Extra Material

The suggestion regarding extra material before the new episodes were rolled out were based on QM learner engagement standards, which pertain to activities fostering instructor-student interaction, as well as expressing instructor responsiveness and availability. In the context of *Explosion Bus*, tell viewers when to expect new content and keep new content coming in order to continue fostering the relationship. When gathering the data for Phase Two, the suggestion to provide additional self-contained content before the new episodes yielded some unexpected results. The most notable materialized after several of the 21 shorter *Explosion Bus* episodes had been posted.

On May 1, 2012, Snyder began posting even shorter “prequel” series from the *Explosion Bus* universe called *Teachers Lounge*.³³ Each episode featured comical conversations from when Jon Gold and Leo Huckstep (the primary characters from *Explosion Bus*) had been teachers. The episodes were between one and three minutes in length and included self-contained, stand-alone topics such as tests, rubrics, discipline and other education-related themes. Of course, the conversations between the two characters were entirely comical, and these episodes were short and easier to understand than *Explosion Bus* had been. By the end of Phase Two, six of the top-ten-viewed videos on the *Explosion Bus* channel were *Teachers Lounge* episodes and not *Explosion Bus*. Clearly, *Teachers Lounge* had drawn viewers more quickly, with “*Parent Conferences*” topping the list with 6,916 by the end of Phase Two. All of the seven *Teachers*

³³ All *Teachers Lounge* episodes are available on their YouTube *Explosion Bus* sub-channel <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLED6DD8B35F844F1E>.

Lounge episodes Snyder posted gained the *Explosion Bus* YouTube channel 120 new subscribers, and received 19 comments, 41 shares, 115 likes (11 dislikes), and 107 annotation clicks.

Table 17. Overall Top 10 *EB* Channel videos during Phase Two.

No.	Top 10 EB Channel videos (date posted)	Length	Average Percentage of View Time	Views
1.	Teachers Lounge: "Parent Conferences" (5/1/12)	1.97	51.18	6,916
2.	<i>Explosion Bus</i> Clip: Millions of Hits (2/22/12)	0.67	59.07	4355
3.	Teachers Lounge: "Tests" (5/1/12)	1.75	50.5	3920
4.	EB Origin Story #1 (3/11/12)	6.02	53.74	3015
5.	Teachers Lounge: "Task Force" (5/2/12)	2.37	56.29	2468
6.	Teachers Lounge: "Student Teachers" (5/1/12)	2.82	34.59	2173
7.	Teachers Lounge: "Preparation" (5/1/12)	1.13	40.77	1653
8.	Web Audition: Buckley, Cartoon (4/2/12)	0.95	72.17	1490
9.	Teachers Lounge: "Rubrics" (5/1/12)	1.98	60.15	939
10.	<i>Explosion Bus</i> Clip: Final Moments (2/22/12)	0.50	53.16	925

Assessment: Impact of Website Changes

The specific changes to the webpage were covered in chapter four. During Phase Two, the Google Analytics data for ExplosionBus.com show an initial increase of webpage visits through the first half of Phase Two, followed by a noted drop sometime in the latter part of May 2012 (see Fig. 2). In regard to the suggestions made in my initial emails to the *EB* team, one suggestion shows readily quantifiable results. It was suggested that the website remind viewers when the first episode of the next season would be posted. Anyone who came to ExplosionBus.com during this time would see a countdown to the next new episode. Table 17, Overall top 10 *EB* channel videos during Phase Two, demonstrates that the only *Explosion Bus*

episode to make the top ten viewed videos was the first of the shorter episodes: *EB Origin Story #1* (2012). The number of views (3,015) was over four times the next highest episode's viewership (683), as shown in Table 16. This is far above the average viewership of the longer episodes (125), with the exception of episode five.

As for the noted drop in ExplosionBus.com visits, this coincides with the *EB* team's having mentioned explosionbus.com in each of their audition video descriptions. During Phase Two, none of the episodes themselves mentioned ExplosionBus.com in the YouTube descriptions below the videos. However, each of the viewer auditions did mention explosionbus.com, but once soliciting viewer auditions was curtailed, all that was posted were episodes that failed to mention there was a related website viewers could visit. Explaining the content provider's expectations to the viewers could have yielded measurable responses, which ties into the next suggestion.

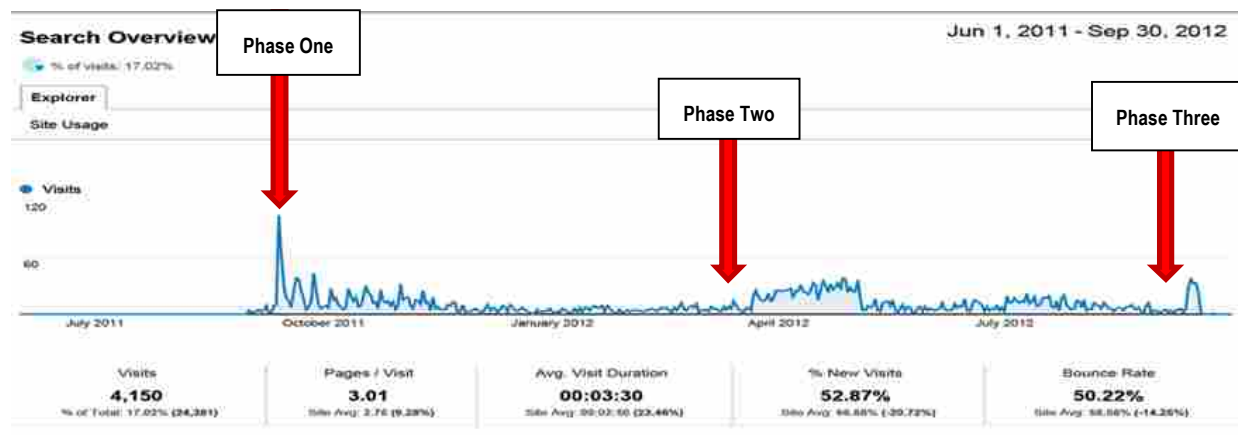


Fig. 11. The pattern of ExplosionBus.com visits from Phase Zero through the end of Phase Two. Screenshot by author.

Assessment: Expressing Explosion Bus Expectations (Objectives)

At the core of my suggestions is the core of sound educational practice—everything within the design should point back to the objectives of the course. Objectives in an entertainment context are what the producer expects (or rather hopes for) in her audience:

- A. Use the closing credits for expressing expectations.
- B. Solicit audition videos.
- C. Ask viewers to tell others.
- D. Visit the “STORE.”
- E. “Save the date” for the next season’s launch.
- F. Get on the *Explosion Bus* email list for further updates.

The first two suggestions will be discussed below, although the team adapted several of the other suggestions. Instead of asking viewers to tell others from the *Explosion Bus* channel, (C) was often done by team members through more personal means, namely through email, Facebook posts and Twitter, which are not included in the data used in this dissertation. Instead of asking the viewer to specifically visit the store (D) or get on an email mailing list (F), the team felt the subscribe feature in YouTube offered the same benefit. Although, they did not request that viewers “save the date” (E) per se, the website would keep them abreast of that date, as well as correspondences sent to channel subscribers.

Expressing Expectations and Annotations in Closing Credits

Within the videos themselves, originally there were no annotations in any *Explosion Bus* channel videos. Annotations are “calls to action,” which invite the viewer to act in some way—whether it be to subscribe, visit a website or watch more videos. Each of these actions is a good indicator of how engaged the viewer is with the content. Clicking on an annotation indicates

curiosity or a desire to subscribe or view more material. This changed as of February 22, 2012, in the latter half of Phase One, when annotations were added to extra videos on the *EB* channel. The first video to include annotations was *Explosion Bus Clip: Elementary School Scandal*, which had been part of the first episode. There were two annotations added: (a) invited the viewer to subscribe and (b) invited the viewer to click to the *Explosion Bus* YouTube page (not ExplosionBus.com).

In Phase Two, the first *EB* episode to utilize annotations was *EB Origin Story #1*. In fact, all of the *Explosion Bus* episodes in Phase Two had been titled with “*EB*” and not *Explosion Bus*. Granted, the name of the channel the video is on is *Explosion Bus* and they mention it in the video description. *Phase Two: Episode Format* has been discussed in chapter four, which includes annotations for subscribing, for visiting the *Explosion Bus* channel page on YouTube and two other annotation options for viewing further content. With the addition of annotations in the video clips, web auditions and, in each of the 21 shorter episodes, the number of annotation clicks had nowhere to go but up. Unfortunately, the data for the annotations was not tallied in YouTube until July 16, 2013 (well into Phase Four), but the overall number of annotation clicks for all of the shorter episodes, auditions, clips and other shorter videos on the *Explosion Bus* channel totaled 3,257 by the end of Phase Four (March 30, 2014).

Soliciting Audition Videos and Spin-Off Series

Creating spin-off series stemmed from the suggestion that the team “release extra material before the show starts up again,” again guided by learner engagement standards³⁴ requesting more interaction with the audience. In December 2012, just before Phase Two, Covett sent each subscriber the following request:

³⁴ QM standard 5.2: Learning activities foster instructor-student, content-student, and if appropriate to the course, student-student interaction.

[I]f you're looking to get more exposure for a talent you have, or the idea of making fun things online interests you, we'd love to work together. Besides featuring weekly web auditions (which we're always looking for), we've helped launch two spin-offs that were dreamed up by a few ambitious fans. (Covett, first version of "welcome" email)

In keeping with expressing expectations, Covett's email alerted viewers of further opportunities to engage with *Explosion Bus*. Concurrent with this email was a request in the descriptions of each web audition video, "Interested in auditioning? Write us!" These descriptions were visible to all YouTube viewers who stumbled upon the audition videos. Later, solicitation of auditions was supported by a brief (12-second) instructional video, "*Explosion Bus: Send Us Your Audition!*" posted on YouTube the same day as the first shorter episode video, March 12, 2012 (the start of Phase Two). The video (see Fig. 9) featured Covett presenting two annotations, one for viewers' questions, and the other answered how the viewers would upload their audition video. Within 24 hours, the team had also posted a sample audition and by March 16, the first audition video from outside the *EB* team had been posted to the *Explosion Bus* YouTube channel.

Qualitative Data/Coding for Phase Two

These were the statistics of measurable viewer activity for just the *Explosion Bus* episodes posted during Phase Two:

Table 18. Analytic Data for All Phase Two *Explosion Bus* episode videos.

No.	Original Episodes (date posted)	Views	Likes	Shares ³⁵	Subscribers	Comments
1.	EB Origin Story #1 (3/11/12)	7,701	17	4	30	12
2.	EB Origin Story #2 (3/19/12)	2,536	7	1	3	2
3.	EB Origin Story #3 (3/27/12)	1,818	4	1	2	2
4.	EB Origin Story #4 (4/02/12)	1,650	2	0	4	0
5.	EB Origin Story #5 (4/07/12)	1,681	1	1	2	2
6.	EB Origin Story #6 (4/16/12)	1,537	7	1	2	2
7.	EB Origin Story #7 (4/23/12)	1,217	3	0	2	0
8.	EB Origin Story #8 (4/30/12)	1,189	8	2	2	8
9.	EB Origin Story #9 (5/07/12)	1,351	5	1	2	0
10.	EB Origin Story #10 (5/15/12)	1,144	5	0	3	2
11.	EB Origin Story #11 (5/22/12)	1,346	6	0	2	3
12.	EB Origin Story #12 (5/28/12)	1,166	2	0	1	2
13.	EB Origin Story #13 (6/04/12)	943	3	0	1	4
14.	EB Origin Story #14 (6/12/12)	918	4	0	0	1
15.	EB Origin Story #15 (6/19/12)	908	4	0	2	12
16.	EB Origin Story #16 (6/25/12)	974	3	1	2	2
17.	EB Origin Story #17 (7/92/12)	842	2	0	1	0
18.	EB Origin Story #18 (7/09/12)	1,037	8	1	4	5
19.	EB Origin Story #19 (7/16/12)	888	4	0	1	7
20.	EB Origin Story #20 (7/23/12)	1,036	3	0	0	2
21.	EB Origin Story #21 (7/30/12)	979	5	0	2	5

By the end of Phase One, the *Explosion Bus* channel had 23 subscribers. By the end of Phase Two, the *Explosion Bus* channel had 500 subscribers. Just before the end of Phase One, Covett began sending her welcome email to all subscribers of the YouTube channel. The first to respond to the spin-off series were a couple of young comedians in Chicago, Tim Barnes and Ian Abramson, who agreed to create a live-action spin-off series entitled *Talent Scouts*. Each episode featured the two comedians looking for local talent on behalf of *Talent Explosion*. Beginning April 5, 2012, Barnes and Abramson posted 19 *Talent Scouts* episodes through Phase Two. The

³⁵ There were no dislikes during Phase Two, so I have omitted that column here.

length of each was between one and a half minutes and nearly five minutes. With no access to the *Talent Scouts*' analytic data, below is a comparison of activities of the *Explosion Bus* channel and the data visible on all of the *Talent Scouts* episodes during Phase Two. Many of the comments on the *Talent Scouts*' videos came from *Explosion Bus* viewers, who often showed an understanding and appreciation of Barnes and Abramson's humor.

Table 19. Comments for Phase Two User-Generated Videos and Spin-off Series.

Phase Two	No. of Videos/Clicks/Shares/Likes/ Comments	Viewer Auditions	Talent Scouts
EB Team			
# EB Team Videos	44		19
Viewer Audition Videos³⁶	45	45	-
YouTube Views /Clicks	18,019 total	5,320 (included in 18,019)	9,921
Shares	13 episodes + 25 other	421	
Disliked	17	8	3
Liked	430	197	266
EB/Team Comments	73		2
Viewer Comments	171	66	70
≤5 wd. Neg	1	*	-
≤5 wd. Neut	12		1
≤5 wd. Pos	42		18
>5 wd. Neg	5		-
>5 wd. Neut	21		-
>5 wd. Pos	90		40

³⁶ These videos were created by viewers and were posted by the *EB* team on the *Explosion Bus* YouTube channel. Because the web auditions were not created by the *EB* team themselves, specifics of viewer sentiment concerning web audition videos are not included here.

During Phase One, the *EB* team received six web auditions from five viewers (one video had been split into two). By the end of Phase Two, the *EB* team had received 45 additional web auditions from 48 unique viewers. Three viewers sent in at least two auditions, and 16 came from subscribers who someone on the *EB* team knew personally. Overall, these 45 videos in turn received 5,320 views (included in the 18,019 tally for Phase Two), 197 likes, 66 comments and 421 shares.

Qualitative Analysis of Phase Two

The quality and skill sets required of the web auditions were quite varied. Some viewers posted humorous auditions in the comedic spirit of the show—a masked man in a blue furry outfit simply riding a bicycle around in circles on a street (“*Web Audition: Bryan, Bicyclist,*” 2012), or *Rob’s Dancing Gnomes* (“*Web Audition: Rob’s Dancing Gnomes,*” 2012) where the viewer introduces “animated” garden gnomes moving jerkily in various patterns on the floor to techno-pop music. Other “contestants” took their auditions more seriously and sang or rapped songs they wrote, or played musical instruments. One viewer even displayed an alleged *Explosion Bus* video game (“*Web Audition: Michael, 3D Video Game,* 2012), featuring images and content from the show in a 3D graphic environment. The level of engagement to participate in co-producing content was quite high as “contestants” had to conceive, produce and edit their videos, and log in to YouTube to upload them. Considering the total number of subscribers at the time was 500, having a nearly 9.6 percent response is very good.

In Phase Zero, there had only been three comments, two of which indicated an intense interest in the coming show—“awesome!!!”(Mary Morra5, 2011). In Phase One, comments had been disabled. However, in Phase Two, there was a notable increase in comment activity. As a result, in addition to the standard positive, neutral or negative categories of comments (which in

itself, indicates an increase in engagement) I have added sub-codes where applicable to cite instances of higher engagement in the comment. For instance, “IntensPos” expresses a strong intensity of the positive view toward the show—“Great Great Great!!!!” (WhateverWhateverCat, 2014); “This series is so underrated. I’m on my 10th play through!” (TheAngelscene, 2014). Neutral comments that ask a question—“Who’s singing?” (rayword45backup, 2013) are cited as “-Query,” and show an interest wanting to know more about the content, character or plot. Comments exhibiting a humorous sensibility as “-Joke,” and those showing an understanding of other Katz or Snyder productions are “-U.” Negative comments providing constructive criticism are coded “-CC,” and express a positive concern for the show. Negative comments that are merely negative with no specifics on how to improve the content are coded as “-Troll.” These nuances shows a level of interest in the show or familiarity with other programs Katz or Snyder were involved with. The amounts of these nuanced codes for Phase Two episodes are in the following table:

Table 20. Phase Two Comments and Nuanced Codes.

Phase Two Comments	Overall No.	Positive Subcodes	Neutral Subcodes	Negative Subcodes
Posted March 11, 2012-September 16, 2012		IntensPos	-Query -Joke -U	-CC -Troll
# of <i>EB</i> Videos/Episodes	89 (including 21)			
No Comments	3 Snyder +3 instructional +22 web auditions			
Comments	73	-	-	-
≤5 wd. Neg	1	-	-	-
≤5 wd. Neut	12	-	1-Query	-
≤5 wd. Pos	42	6 IntensPos	-	-
>5 wd. Neg	5	-	-	1-Troll
>5 wd. Neut	21	-	3-Query 2-Joke 4-U	-
>5 wd. Pos	90	17 IntensPos	-	-
<i>EB</i>/Team Comments	73	-	-	-
Audition	45	-	-	-
Spin-off	1	-	-	-
Recap	-	-	-	-
Extra series	-	-	-	-

So, not only were there more people exhibiting higher levels of interest and engagement in *Explosion Bus*, the intensity of their interest appeared to be growing as well. Intensely positive feelings were definitely growing, and in spite of one “-troll” comment, negative opinions were rare. Four of the neutral comments were neither positive nor negative toward *Explosion Bus*, but

indicated a familiarity with *Dr. Katz*, *Home Movies* and *Squigglevision*, three of Snyder's other television productions.

Table 21. Overall Tally of Explosion Bus Activities during Phase Two.

Activities	Phase Two
EB page visitors	5479 ³⁷
EB page views	21,703
# of EB YouTube videos	21 episodes +45 auditions +8 instruct/promos +7 Teachers + 8 Snyder vid = 89
YouTube views /clicks	18,019 (4772 episodes)
Videos with zero comments	3 Snyder +3 instruct.+22 web auditions= 28
<50% ep viewed	.09523%
>50% ep viewed	90.4761%
Average % of episode viewed	69.628
Shared	(13 episodes only) 459 all
Annotation clicks	_* ³⁸
Disliked	1 episode only (17)
Liked	(103 episodes only) 430
Subscribed	(68 episodes only) 201 all
Comments³⁹	(73 episodes only) 202
<5 wd. Neg	1
>5 wd. Neg	5
-Constructive	-
-Troll	1
<5 wd. Neut	12
>5 wd. Neut	21
-Joke	2
-Query	1+3
-Understand	4
<5 wd. Pos	42
>5 wd. Pos	90
IntensPos	6+17
EB/Team comments	73
Audition	45

³⁷ Phase 2 Google Analytics, from 12 March 2012-17 Sept 2012. Google Analytics also shows an average session duration of 2:30 minutes, and a bounce rate of 61.16%..

³⁸ Data are not available in analytics.

³⁹ Comments= total number of individual comments. These do not include comments by *EB* team members. Comments that depict higher levels of interest are included in the total number of comments, but also counted separately.

Table 21. Continued.

Activities	Phase Two
Spin-off	1 (19 episodes)
Recap	-
Extra series	-

Lessons Learned During Phase Two

At the end of Phase Two, Snyder decided he was “just interested in writing the funny things,” (Cooke & Snyder, 2016), and not interested in culling through auditions for each episode. Therefore, the solicitation of viewer web auditions ended with the end of Phase Two. Covett (Cooke & Covett, 2016), says she learned how to be a good employee during this phase and developed skills for being a good self-starter.

Snyder and Covett alike originally believed the invested members of the audience would prefer to find content on explosionbus.com. Because of that, the team had spent a lot of time developing the original and subsequent versions of the site, but eventually found viewers were most interested in watching the videos on YouTube and moving on. The exception for this was when they offered the first seven-episode series on a DVD via the *Explosion Bus* website or iTunes.com. The team did get a few orders for the DVDs from the website (Covett estimates less than 200), but overall interest in the rest of the website, low to begin with, dissipated as time went on.

PHASE THREE: SEPTEMBER 17, 2012—MARCH 12, 2013

Assumptions, “The Work” and the Output

During Phase Three, Snyder and his team posted 35 videos: 20 new (short) episodes of *Explosion Bus*, one promotional trailer, three instructional videos (two telling viewers to

subscribe and share, one explaining the new look), seven web auditions, and another mini-series featuring the voices of Katz and Leopold entitled *Average Americans*.⁴⁰ In the interest of time and expense, *Average Americans* was not animated, but featured viewer HippyWoman (the recap series host) interviewing two puppets about issues such as “Climate Change,” “The Academy Awards” and the tradition of “Valentine’s Day.” During Phase Three, the team posted four *Average Americans* episodes along with *Explosion Bus*.

On September 18, 2012, a second version of the *Explosion Bus* webpage was launched. The look of the characters and aesthetic design of the show up to this point had been consistent due to senior animator, Robert Keogh. However in 2012, he was no longer available and with a new senior animator, Lyndy Bazile, the look of the show changed significantly from its more static, illustrative and sketchy look, to a standard, animated character design.

⁴⁰ All *Average Americans* episodes are available on their YouTube *Explosion Bus* subchannel https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLuVfzIbj2AZJwzrMHI_YhieS3ghisf9Ha.



Fig. 12. Phase Three version of *Explosion Bus* website. Screenshot by author.

Although some components of the first intervention remained, such as a sub-banner stating the tie-in to Dr. Katz and most of the main navigation options, several important logistical changes were made to the website's design:

1. No longer was the viewer required to scroll down the page to get all the information.
2. The navigation bar was moved from the left to the top of the screen to provide more space. REVIEWS was removed from the main navigation options, and replaced with BLOG. The other items remained, but were reordered to ABOUT, BLOG, EPISODES, EXTRAS and STORE.

3. Below the main video player was a band of graphic buttons directing the viewer to BUY THE DVD, view the ORIGIN STORY (as the first season was now called) and a link to other ANIMATED SHORTS the team had created.⁴¹
4. A second section of navigation was now at the bottom of the page and subdivided into FOLLOW US (Facebook, Twitter, *EB* Blog), LOOK AROUND (repeating the buttons across the top navigation except for BLOG, which was now in FOLLOW US), and GET INVOLVED: Audition for *Explosion Bus*, View Auditions, Discover More Content and Contact).
5. Navigation was clarified by displaying a row of numbered buttons below the main video player, one for each episode. The number of the current episode button was highlighted from the rest of the buttons.
6. To contextualize the content and perhaps create curiosity in the viewer, a descriptive blurb now appeared next to the main video player.
7. For ease of navigation, the viewer could select any episode in the series at any time and know where in the storyline this episode took place.
8. Alternatively, the viewer could click a left arrow or right arrow on either side of the main viewer to see the previous or next episodes in the series.

Phase Three: Episode Format

1. Due to the difficulty of corralling and editing audition videos into the show, auditions were no longer solicited or edited into *Explosion Bus*.

⁴¹ During the gap of time between the creation of the third version of *Explosion Bus*, the team had created several other series featuring Tom Snyder's advanced writing series, and a couple other series featuring only Jonathan Katz and Tom Leopold called *Teacher's Lounge* and *Average Americans*. I will discuss more about the implications of these more self-contained series in the next chapter.

2. To cut the time of the opening credits of the show, they no longer featured all of the cast, but only Jonathan Katz and Tom Leopold.
3. The end credits now began with the words: “More Subscribers = More *Explosion Bus!*”
4. The end credits no longer featured a voiceover, but included a subscribe button, links to two other *Explosion Bus* videos and an animated cursor showing viewers where to click to get to these other videos.

All of these changes helped make it easier for a passing viewer to glean information more quickly from the webpage or from each individual episode. If these changes were made to a course being reviewed by a Quality Matters reviewer, many would comply with key course instructional design standards, and the course would be found in closer compliance to the rubric. The next section examines and analyzes the responses from viewers within Phase Three.

Analytic/Quantitative Data for Phase Three

During Phase Three, being the liaison between Snyder and the audience gave Katie Covett a better sense of what was working or not working with the audience. It was also during this time that Covett offered a different strategy to attract viewership in addition to my suggestions—namely, placing seemingly more “salacious” content within *Explosion Bus* episodes. This included making the animated characters’ design more “sexy,” making provocative thumbnail graphic choices along with the video and associating episode titles to keyword searches that had to do with sex, drugs or video games (three popular categories of online searches). For instance, some episode titles from Phase Two were *Strip Club* (2012), *One Night Stand* (2012) and *Smokin’ Hot* (2012). The thumbnail graphics on the YouTube channel sometimes also featured scantily-dressed characters. For instance, episode one of the new season

(as it was referred to), *One Night Stand*, featured Leo lying in bed next to a buxom woman. The episode with the currently highest viewership is called *Strip Club* and shows a thumbnail image from the show depicting Leo sitting next to a woman in a string bikini, holding a glass of wine.

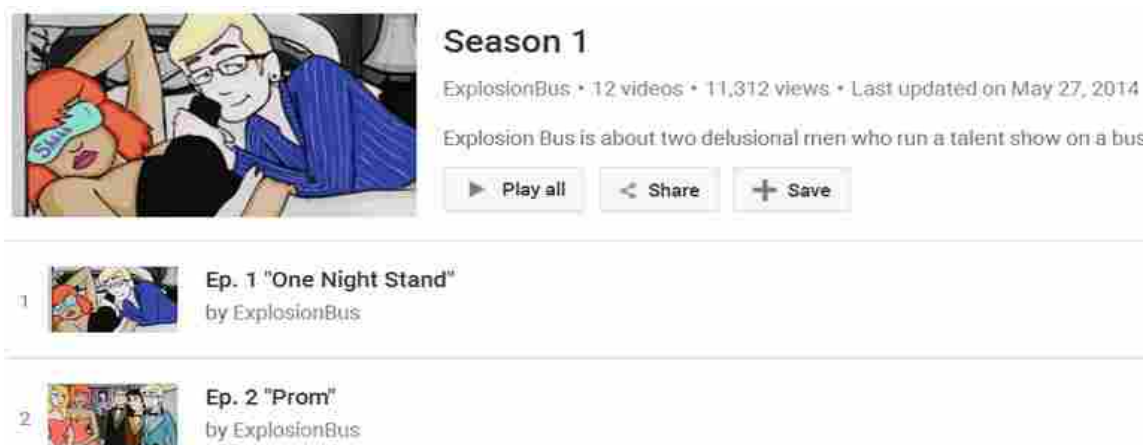


Fig. 13. YouTube Thumbnail Graphic for Ep. 1 “One Night Stand.” Screenshot by author.

Covett feels this approach somewhat pushed against the core audience expectations. However, the team really wanted viewers to find the series and were willing to give this approach a try. It is possible that episodes with those types of titles did attract viewers, at least to the extent that they clicked on them.

By the end of Phase Three, *One Night Stand* had 9,221 views and, yet, the *Strip Club* video had 1,870 views. As of July 2015, the number of views for *Strip Club* had grown to 23,662 (Table 38). Currently,⁴² the number is over 99,413. Clearly, this video received much higher interest than the other episodes. However, when viewer expectations were not met in the episode content, the viewers did not “stick.” The analytics reveal that the average viewer left the video

⁴² January 2017.

within one and a half minutes. The first moments of the episode consist of a discussion outside a strip club, the characters debating whether to go in since it is demeaning to women. Expectations were not met for a viewer looking with the search words *Strip Club*.

By the end of Phase Three, the top ten viewed videos were the following:

Table 22. Top Ten Videos by the end of Phase Three (12 March 2012).

No.	Top 10 Episodes (date posted)	Length	Average View Time (in minutes)	Views
1.	Ep. 1 "One Night Stand" (11/10/12)	6.55	3.7	9,221
2.	Ep. 2 "Prom" (11/17/12)	6.35	3.7	4,226
3.	Ep. 10 "Yoga" (1/28/13)	6.38	3.1	3,388
4.	Ep. 3 "The Nigerian Prince" (11/26/12)	5.93	3.3	3,130
5.	Ep. 6 "Las Vegas" (12/17/12)	6.23	2.8	3,017
6.	Ep. 5 "Comedy Writers" (12/8/12)	6.48	3	2,998
7.	Ep. 4 "Period" (12/4/12)	6.22	3.4	2,637
8.	Ep. 9 "Ping-Pong" (1/21/13)	6.45	3.6	2,026
9.	EB Origin Story #28 "Strip Club" (10/29/12)	4.72	2.6	1,870
10.	Ep. 8 "Smokin' Hot" (1/14/13)	6.27	3.3	1,661

Qualitative Data/Coding for Phase Three

In Phase Three, the *EB* Team posted 35 videos to their channel. Those overall results are presented in Table 23.

Table 23. Overall Tally of Explosion Bus Activities during Phase Three.

Activities	Phase Three
# of <i>EB</i> YouTube Videos	35
YouTube Views/Clicks	51,042
<50% Viewed	60%
>50% Viewed	40%
Average percent of video viewed	51.179
Annotation Clicks	*
Disliked	20
Liked	668
Shared	51
Subscribed	286
Comments	171
≤5 wd. Neg	-
>5 wd. Neg	6
≤5 wd. Neut	16
>5 wd. Neut	26
≤5 wd. Pos	64
>5 wd. Pos	125
<i>EB</i>/Team Comments	76
Audition videos	7
Spin-off	3
Recap	1
Extra series	-

During this time, the *EB* team decided to feature viewers as animated extras as well as actual locations from the cities the bus was visiting in the series. Several comments were made by excited viewers who recognized themselves in the show. The total number of standard (not-nuanced) comments increased in Phase Three, although the number of new episodes had decreased by one. Annotations linking viewers to watch other *EB* content, as well as the Subscribe button were generating results. The number of positive comments over five words in length was over 33 percent compared to the same level of comments in Phase Two. The percentage of viewers making “IntensPos” comments had grown from approximately 11.3

percent (23 out of 202 comments) in Phase Two, to 17.8 percent (44 out of 247 comments) in Phase Three.

One more suggested change in the *EB* episode format that expressed expectations (per a conversation I had with Covett), was displaying a graphic at the end of each episode which stated “More subscribers = More *Explosion Bus*.” This reminder yielded 276 new subscribers during Phase Three from the episodes, plus 10 more subscribers from the other *EB* team videos posted during Phase Three. As of October 2016, these Phase Three episodes had garnished an additional 739 subscribers.

The *Talent Scouts*⁴³ from Chicago began their series in Phase Two, but the *EB* team was able to talk two other viewers into creating spin-off series in the interest of supplying more content on the channel. In Phase Three, there was also the *Explosion Bus Lifestyle Channel*⁴⁴ with Spiegelpwns, who reviewed items in the *EB* webpage store. The second series was *Recap with Hippy*,⁴⁵ a separate video series posted shortly after each new *Explosion Bus* episode summarizing “the story so far.” This series was meant to help viewers follow the story. Each of these co-producers/viewers were already creating content on their own YouTube channels, but none had as many viewers as the *Explosion Bus* channel. There was one more spin-off series that was not initiated by the *EB* team. This came from Charlie Alittleoffcolor, a self-proclaimed super-fan of Jonathan Katz, who referred to herself as the *Crazy Katz Lady*⁴⁶ and would often sing self-penned tunes about her love for *Explosion Bus* and, especially, Jonathan Katz.

⁴³ All *Talent Scout* episodes can be found on their YouTube *Explosion Bus* sub-channel at <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PL0D487810400A1FA5>.

⁴⁴ Spiegelpwns has since deleted all videos from his *Explosion Bus Lifestyle* sub-channel, so they are no longer available.

⁴⁵ All *Recap with Hippy* episodes can be found on her YouTube *Explosion Bus* sub-channel at <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLuVfzIbj2AZL0pSdhyr40u9lDD83cmutz>.

⁴⁶ All *Crazy Katz Lady* episodes can be found on her YouTube *Explosion Bus* sub-channel <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLuVfzIbj2AZL2wJz45rlQQgTH-oPe9Myj>.

The investment of time of these viewers is quite significant, as there was a lot of planning, scripting, shooting and editing these other series. The *Talent Scouts* posted 11 more episodes in Phase Three (totaling 30). These were posted from April 5, 2012 into Phase Three and ended on December 28, 2012. HippyWoman posted 18 recap episodes, from September 20, 2012 through the end of Phase Three. Likewise, Spiegelpwns posted 43 “Lifestyle” reviews from September 20, 2012 through the end of Phase Three, each roughly two minutes long. Between October 16, 2012 and the very beginning of Phase Four, Crazy Katz Lady posted 10 videos averaging approximately three minutes each.

Not having access to their analytics, as of January 2017, the *Talent Scouts*’ channel had 391 subscribers, Spiegelpwns had 72, HippyWoman had 143, and Crazy Katz Lady had 64. Katie Covett admits that because the team felt somewhat responsible for all the effort these viewers were putting into this content, Covett sent each of them a \$20 stipend via PayPal every time they posted a new video on the *Explosion Bus* channel. In total, the *Explosion Bus* team contributed \$20 for each of 101 spin-off episodes, totaling \$2,020. The result of this added expense was that each spin-off viewer cost *Explosion Bus* approximately 10 cents each.

With this expansion of videos on the *EB* channel during Phase Two, came a lot of other *EB* network activity. Without access to the spin-offs’ analytics, I pulled the following totals as of August 2015.

Table 24. Analytic Data for All Phase Three Explosion Bus episodes & Spin-off Series.

Phase Three	EB Team + Viewer Auditions	Talent Scouts	EB Lifestyle with Spiegelpwns	Recaps With Hippy	Crazy Katz Lady
# EB YouTube Videos Audition Videos YouTube Views /Clicks Disliked Liked Comments	28 7 51,042 (45,453 from episodes) 20 total (12 from episodes) 668 total (523 from episodes) 247 total (171 from episodes)	11 3,162 2 84 14	43 (1 in ph4) 8,158 ⁴⁷ 18 229 88	18 3424 1 67 20	9 (1 in ph4) 4456 0 67 13
<5 wd. Neg	-	-	2	-	-
>5 wd. Neg	6	-	2	-	-
<5 wd. Neut	16	-	9-joking	1	-
>5 wd. Neut	26	8-joking	13-joking/queries	2	1
<5 wd. Pos	64	1	15	8	3
>5 wd. Pos	125	1	24	8	8
EB/Team Comments	76	4-joking	23	1	1

⁴⁷ Data for views from one episode entitled *Reviews with Friends: Explosion Bus ATs* was missing, and the video is no longer accessible on YouTube.

Qualitative Analysis of Phase Three

Phase Three saw a large jump in YouTube views for all *EB* videos, topping 51,000. The episodes alone attracted 45,453 views. There also was an increase in IntensePos comments. Of the 64 positive comments made during this phase, there were 13 intensely positive comments less than five words long, such as “Love, love, love!!!! (Lee Ann Stoner, 2013), and 31 intensely positive comments were over five words.

One particularly IntensePos comment came from a viewer who had this to say:

The thing that really makes this show is the delivery. Katz, Snyder, and Leopold are masters of comedy. There’s no obnoxious punchlines, nothing too vulgar, and none of it is forced. It has a sense of mature humor that makes you laugh but also think. Something as hilariously intelligent as this should have well over 100,000 views. (emaghet, 2013)

This assessment shows a thoughtful regard for why this viewer enjoys the series and expresses his bewilderment over why the show is not more popular.

This was also the phase that had the most “negative” comments. However, of the six comments that were coded negative, four offered constructive criticism or showed an understanding of the other productions featuring Jon Katz (“It just ain’t Dr. Katz without Squigglevision. Hello Cracked fellow readers!”) (Donbasuradenuuevo, (2014). Two viewers were concerned for the series (“I knew this show wouldn’t last. It’s too funny and too clever. I’m so disappointed there isn’t going to be any more ☹”) (Shunarjuna, 2014), and out of all 202 comments, only one was considered a “troll” saying, “Am I supposed to watch this while high/drun? I didn’t even smile. Bad recommendation, Cracked” (Hylialola, 2014).

The amounts of nuanced codes for Phase Three are in the following table:

Table 25. Phase Three Comments and Nuanced Codes.

Phase Three Comments	Overall No.	Positive Subcodes	Neutral Subcodes	Negative Subcodes
Posted September 17, 2012-Mar 12, 2013		IntensPos	-Query -Joke -U	-CC -Troll
# of <i>EB</i> Episodes	20			
Comments	171	-	-	-
<5 wd. Neg	-	-	-	-
>5 wd. Neg	6	-	-	4-CC 1-Troll
<5 wd. Neut	16	-	1-Query 2-U	-
>5 wd. Neut	26	-	8-Query 2-Joke 5-U	-
<5 wd. Pos	64	13		-
		IntensPos	-	
>5 wd. Pos	125	31	-	-
		IntensPos		
<i>EB</i>/Team Comments	76	-	-	-

Seven more web auditions were posted in Phase Three, although they were no longer featured at the start of each episode. One came from Charlie Alittleoffcolor, whose video, in addition to her own volunteered, spin-off series, featured proof that she was a “super-fan.” Her “audition” showed a bread maker she had painted with images of Jon and Leo on the side of it. She leans her face against the bread maker and declares, “Oh, Jon and Leo. I love you both so much! I never want an episode of *Explosion Bus* to end. So now, I can keep you close. I’ll keep you near me. I’ll keep you... forever. Boom!” The intensity of this declaration could be merely in the name of humor, but she did take the time to paint images of *Explosion Bus* characters and a heart on the side of her bread maker (Charlie Alittleoffcolor, 2012).



Fig. 14. Web Audition: Charlie, Arts & Crafts for *Explosion Bus*. Screenshot by author.

I am not able to prove this growing intensity of affection for the series is a direct result of my suggestions, but this fan created this video and her spin-off series as a result of the team’s communicating their expectations with their viewers. At least one viewer had crossed into the “super-fan” category and through this video, her web series, and the comments she made in response to the *Explosion Bus* YouTube channel, the *EB* team could assess this intensity more readily than through analytic data.

Lessons Learned during Phase Three

During Phase Three, a switch in naming conventions reveals something significant across the twenty *Explosion Bus* videos, when reexamining the analytics three and a half years later. Some of the episodes with provocative titles did show a high click rate, compared to other episodes. These titles were posted as part of the Phase Three changes. In Phase Two, the shorter episodes that had been one third of the Phase One episodes had been renamed to “*EB Origin Story*,” with only an episode number following it. There were no titles that told viewers any further content, except with the *EB Origin story* #28, which was called “*Strip Club*.”

Table 26. Comparison of top videos at the end of Phase Three and three years later.

No.	Top 10 Episodes (date posted)	Views in March 2013	Views in October 2016
1.	Ep. 1 "One Night Stand" (11/10/12)	9,221	30,625
2.	Ep. 2 "Prom" (11/17/12)	4,226	32,150
3.	Ep. 10 "Yoga" (1/28/13)	3,388	8,326
4.	Ep. 3 "The Nigerian Prince" (11/26/12)	3,130	8,407
5.	Ep. 6 "Las Vegas" (12/17/12)	3,017	4,810
6.	Ep. 5 "Comedy Writers" (12/8/12)	2,998	5,071
7.	Ep. 4 "Period" (12/4/12)	2,637	7,888
8.	Ep. 9 "Ping-Pong" (1/21/13)	2,026	3,515
9.	EB Origin Story #28 "Strip Club" (10/29/12)	1,870	99,413
10.	Ep. 8 "Smokin' Hot" (1/14/13)	1,661	6,879
11.	EB Origin Story #29	1,054	7,319
12.	Ep. 12 "The Joke-Off"	2,070	4,038
13.	Ep. 7 "Gun Control"	1,528	3,419
14.	Ep. 11 "Daryl Hall & the Talent Scouts"	1,545	3,341
15.	EB Origin Story #27	1,870	3,204
16.	EB Origin Story #24	1,151	1,702
17.	EB Origin Story #23	1,278	1,642
18.	EB Origin Story #26	1,283	1,548
19.	EB Origin Story #25	946	1,398
20.	EB Origin Story #22	992	1,280

At the end of Phase Three, "*Strip Club*" had been the ninth most-viewed episode. Three and half years later, it was number one with 99,413 views in the fall of 2016. Two other titled episodes passed the 30,000 mark—"One Night Stand" and "Prom." However, the next most-viewed episode, "*Episode 3 'The Nigerian Prince,'*" had 8,407 views by the end of 2016. Upon further examination of the analytics, as well as some of the later viewer comments, on four occasions, three blogs had promoted *Explosion Bus*: Splitsider.com on November 9, 2011, AnimationMag.net on May 24, 2012, and Cracked on September 5, 2013 and on October 26, 2013. Cracked's feature in September had direct links to the top-three-viewed episodes, which

the other titled episodes did not. This would account for the drop from 30,625 views for “*One Night Stand*” to 8,407 and below for the rest. Still significant though is the fact that all of the least-viewed *Explosion Bus* videos were those named with the “*EB Origin Story*” titles. In some, a few episodes gained less than 300 additional views in those three and half years since their posting (i.e., *Origin Story* #22 and #26).

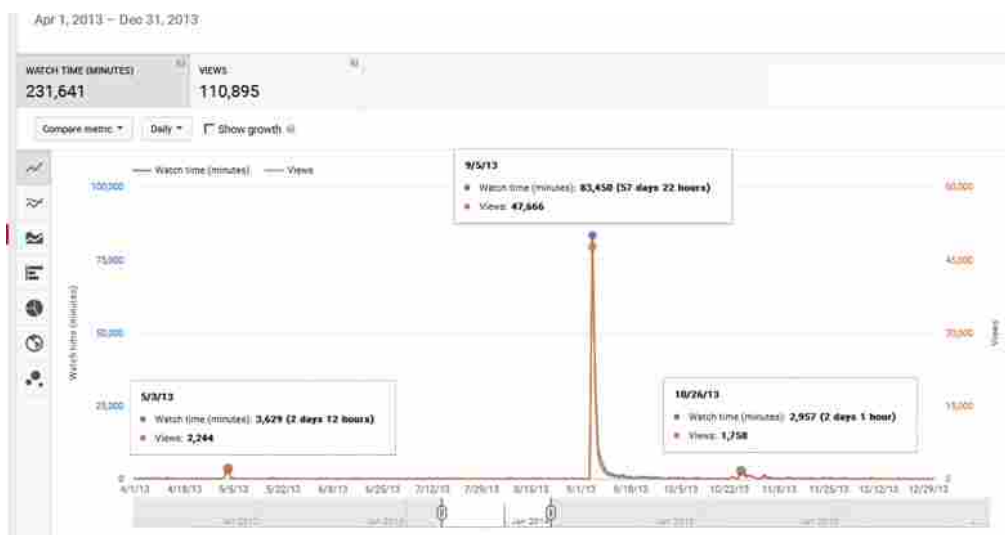


Fig. 15. The leap in *Explosion Bus* views the day Cracked.com featured the series with direct links to three *Explosion Bus* episodes on YouTube.com. Screenshot by author.

It was also at this time that visitors to the *Explosion Bus* website were dropping off. This, I determined, was a result of the fact that none of the episodes had annotations directing the viewers to ExplosionBus.com. When the *EB* team solicited viewers for web auditions during Phase Two, all of the requests mentioned and directed viewers to the webpage, but once auditions were no longer requested, and ExplosionBus.com mentioned in neither the video

descriptions nor the annotations, it became more obvious why visits to the webpage dropped significantly.

Although viewership had no doubt increased with the shorter, self-contained episodes, and between 100 and 200 viewers had purchased the *Explosion Bus* original series on DVD, the number of viewers was still not enough for Snyder to reinstate the monetization feature of YouTube, nor continue his plans of a five-year series arc. As a result, on March 12, 2013, Tom Snyder terminated the *Explosion Bus* series. This could suggest that the educational approach to entertainment was not entirely successful. However, examining the cyclical activities between audience members and content providers still could be useful to other content providers.

Table 27. Overall Tally of Explosion Bus Activities during Phase Three.

Activities	Phase Three
<i>EB</i> page visitors	_* ⁴⁸
<i>EB</i> page views	_*
# of <i>EB</i> YouTube Videos	20 episodes +1 promo + 3 Instruct +4 <i>Average Americans</i> +7 auditions =35
YouTube Views /Clicks	51,042 (45,453 episodes)
Videos with Zero Comments	1 (web audition)
<50% ep viewed	60%
>50% ep viewed	40%
Average Percentage of Episode Viewed	51.179
Shared	(35 thru episodes) 51

⁴⁸ This gap of ExplosionBus.com data stems from a change in web masters and servers, from September 20, 2012 to January 20, 2013 (between the original postings on the old site and the relaunch of the new site). The data for September 18-19 show 13 visitors, 25 page views, an average session duration of 4:51 min and a bounce rate of 46.15 percent. In spite of the lack of data, these numbers do show a decrease in visitors as time went on. The number of distinct visits was 24 and 381 in the first two phases and 4,732 in the last three months of Phase Three. This data also shows that most of the visit durations to the ExplosionBus.com web page were very brief. Through September 30, 2012, 16,494 visits lasted 10 seconds or less. Of the 25, 381 total visitors, 1,471 visitors remained on the website for 10 minutes or more (530, for over a half-hour). During the last part of Phase Three when all the episodes were shorter (January 2012 – March 2013), the analytics show 4,732 visits, with 197 of those visits lasting 10 minutes or longer (21 over a half-hour).

Table 27. Continued.

Activities	Phase Three
Annotation Clicks	- ⁴⁹
Disliked	(12 from ph 3) 20
Liked	(523 from episodes) 668
Subscribed	(276 from episodes) 286
No Comments	1 (web audition)
Comments⁵⁰	(171 from episodes) 247
<5 wd. Neg	-
>5 wd. Neg	6
-Constructive	4
-Troll	1
<5 wd. Neut	16
>5 wd. Neut	26
-Joke	2
-Query	1+8
-Understand	2+5
<5 wd. Pos	64
>5 wd. Pos	125
IntensPos	13+31
EB/Team Comments	76
Audition	7
Spin-off	3 series (11+43+9 = 63 episodes)
Recap	1 (18 episodes)
Extra series	-

PHASE FOUR: MARCH 12, 2013—MARCH 30, 2014 AND BEYOND

Assumptions, “The Work” and the Output

In Phase Four, Snyder and Covett decided to move on from *Explosion Bus*, decreasing the size of the team and creating an entirely new series based on what they had learned from the *Explosion Bus* “experiment.” Covett’s duties expanded to the point of creating some animations in Adobe Flash and acting with Snyder in some of the videos. However, during this phase Covett

⁴⁹ Data are not available in analytics.

⁵⁰ Comments= total number of individual comments. These do not include comments by *EB* team members. Comments that depict higher levels of interest are included in the total number of comments, but are also counted separately.

also came to the point of expressing her limitations (Cooke & Covett, 2016). She did not feel animation was a duty she wanted to pursue so, after a while, she backed away from flash animation. The quantitative and qualitative results of this series follow here, but the analysis and interpretations will be included in chapter five, as they do not pertain so much to *Explosion Bus*, but in how the team had reconceived their work going forward after *Explosion Bus* had ended.

Analytic/Quantitative Data For Phase Four (The *Homo Erectus* Show)

A list of all Phase Four *EB* channel videos (not just the *Homo Erectus* episodes) are listed in Appendix F.

Table 28. Analytic Data for Phase Four *Homo Erectus* videos.

No.	<i>EB</i> Channel Episodes Phase Four (date posted)	Views	Likes	Dislikes	Shares	Subscribers	Comments
1.	<i>Homo Erectus</i> Show: "I don't watch TV"	181	36	2	4	14	8
2.	<i>Homo Erectus</i> Show: "Whispers at parties"	481	21	1	0	4	4
3.	<i>Homo Erectus</i> Show: "Self-Laughter"	442	18	0	1	6	2
4.	<i>Homo Erectus</i> Show: "We don't say that anymore"	292	28	0	1	2	6
5.	<i>Homo Erectus</i> Show: "Mr. Fake Nice guy"	365	20	1	3	4	11
6.	<i>Homo Erectus</i> Show: "States the Obvious"	17	14	0	0	1	1
7.	<i>Homo Erectus</i> Show: "Buyer's Remorse"	644	19	1	0	0	10
8.	<i>Homo Erectus</i> Show: "Bad Translator"	96	15	0	0	1	7
9.	<i>Homo Erectus</i> Show: "Exaggerates Everything"	44	18	0	1	0	8
10.	<i>Homo Erectus</i> Show: "Minces Words"	27	12	0	1	1	1

Table 28. Continued.

No.	<i>EB</i> Channel Episodes Phase Four (date posted)	Views	Likes	Dislikes	Shares	Subscribers	Comments
11.	<i>Homo Erectus</i> Show: "WE"	33	17	0	0	3	5
12.	<i>Homo Erectus</i> Show: "The Weak Male"	10	12	2	0	-1	3
13.	<i>Homo Erectus</i> Show: "My-Political-Insight-Is- Better-Sourced-Than- Yoursicus"	98	15	0	0	1	5
14.	<i>Homo Erectus</i> Show: "Homo-Steals-the- Spotlight"	994	17	2	0	5	5

Qualitative Data/Coding for Phase Four

Nuanced codes for Phase Four are in the following table:

Table 29. Phase Four Comments and Nuanced Codes.

Phase 4 Comments	Overall No.	Positive Subcodes	Neutral Subcodes	Negative Subcodes
		IntensPos	-Query -Joke -U	-CC -Troll
# of <i>EB</i> Episodes	14			
Comments	75	-	-	-
<5 wd. Neg	-	-	-	-
>5 wd. Neg	3	-	-	3-CC
<5 wd. Neut	3	-	-	-
>5 wd. Neut	7	-	2 -Query	-
<5 wd. Pos	5	-	-	-
>5 wd. Pos	40	10 IntensPos (Plot Idea)	-	-
<i>EB</i>/Team Comments	41	-	-	-

The output of the *EB* Team was much lower in Phase Four than in past phases, but the team was responding more frequently to viewer comments. They were also informing viewer expectations within the comments sections of each YouTube video, which was impacting and increasing viewer discussions—especially with having viewers provide ideas for new *Homo Erectus* episodes.

Table 30. Overall Tally of Explosion Bus Activities during Phase Four.

Activities	Phase Four⁵¹
<i>EB</i> Page Visitors	_* ⁵²
<i>EB</i> Page Views	_*
# of <i>EB</i> YouTube Videos	14 episodes +4 podcasts+1 short +1 Snyder vid+1 <i>EB</i> 2-hr audio = 21
YouTube Views /Clicks	10,654 all (9,800 episodes)
Videos with Zero Comments	4 (all 3 rd party podcasts)
<50% ep viewed	0%
>50% ep viewed	100%
Average Percentage of Episode Viewed	63.35
Shared	85
Annotation Clicks	959
Disliked	All 5 from episodes
Liked	251 (233 from episodes)
Subscribed	All 24 from episodes
No Comments	4 (all 3 rd party podcasts)
Comments⁵³	90 (75 from episodes)
<5 wd. Neg	-
>5 wd. Neg	3
-Constructive	3

⁵¹ Phase Four data is based on March 30, 2014.

⁵² *Explosion Bus* page analytics are not included from Phase Four as the data gap continued through the rest of this phase. The data was later tracked by talentexplosion.com following the end of Phase Four (March 30, 2012) and it shows only one visitor during this time. It was after Phase Four that I was collecting information about the website design, and no doubt my visits have increased and skewed the overall numbers. In spite of the lack of data, the numbers across each of the phases do show a decrease in visitors as time went on.

⁵³ Comments= total number of individual comments. These do not include comments by *EB* team members. Comments that depict higher levels of interest are included in the total number of comments, but are also counted separately.

Table 30. Continued.

Activities	Phase Four ⁵⁴
-Troll	-
<5 wd. Neut	3
>5 wd. Neut	7
-Joke	-
-Query	2
-Understand	-
<5 wd. Pos	5
>5 wd. Pos	40
IntensPos	10 (plot ideas)
EB/Team Comments	41
Audition	-
Spin-off	2 Both posted 1 episode each
Recap	-
Extra series	1

Now that the data for each phase have been collected and coded along a continuum of user-generated activities (via quantitative and qualitative information), chapter five compares and interprets the activities across all these phases, and notes changes in audience behaviors once modifications were made to the website and the episode formats.

⁵⁴ Phase Four data is based on March 30, 2014.

CHAPTER V

INTERPRETATION OF RESULTS

The results covered in chapter four were designed to answer the following questions:

1. Can utilizing an educational tool or framework help increase audience engagement to the point that more of them will view the content, participate in creative acts (become co-producers) and consequently help in the expansion of an entertainment audience?
2. Can entertainment content providers benefit from conceptualizing their viewing audience as students? If so, how can they benefit from this reconceptualization?
3. Can evaluating viewer activities and creative work provide an adequate means of assessing entertainment content (or a cultural artifact's) appeal? If so, why?

In this chapter, we search chapter four's results for evidence of growing engagement across the three primary phases the *Explosion Bus* series and channel was active. The results of the *Explosion Bus* YouTube channel as a whole are compared and contrasted across all phases of this case study, especially at the points of the implementation of my suggestions between Phases One and Two, and Phases Two and Three. The Overview of Results and subsections corresponding to each of my research questions discuss some of the notable findings.

Appendix H (on page X) shows the entire cross-analysis of all viewer activities from the lowest measurable engagement (merely clicking on a video or website link) to the highest engagement (a viewer-produced related series) across all phases of the *Explosion Bus* YouTube channel and website. In this chapter, Appendix H is subdivided into six clusters: (a) analytic activities requiring no login; (b) percentages of videos viewed (requiring no login); (c) ExplosionBus.com webpage visits (requiring no login); (d) analytic activities requiring a login;

(e) qualitative activities in the form of comments and (f) qualitative activities in the form of videos.

To accommodate some third-party activities that impacted the *Explosion Bus* YouTube channel, I am including some notable findings following Phase Four (during 2015 and thereafter). These findings include a few curated websites (StumbleUpon.com and Cracked.com), which promoted *Explosion Bus* in their own viewer networks and significantly impacted the *Explosion Bus* YouTube viewership. These activities were outside of the *EB* team's control and my suggestions, but impacted the *EB* channel's activities and, for that reason, have also been included in this chapter. The chapter begins with an overall look at the results across all phases.

QUESTION 1: DID EDUCATIONAL PRACTICES HELP *EXPLOSION*

***BUS*?/OVERVIEW OF RESULTS**

Based on a cross-phase comparison of viewing numbers, modifying the *EB* content with an educational tool appears to have helped increase audience engagement to the point that more of them viewed the content, participated in creative acts (became co-producers) and helped expand the audience. Figure 16 depicts the increase of views of the *Explosion Bus* channel via the analytic data. Phases Two and Three were clearly more successful in expanding the audience activities than in Phase One. The viewership of the annotated, shorter, more self-contained episodes (suggestions from chapter four, p. 174) jumped after Phase Zero and the original formats of the episodes at the start of Phase One. Releasing extra material in the latter halves of each phase before a new series was launched resulted in overall continued visits to the channel (and the webpage). The number of viewers participating in *EB*-related creative acts grew by default, since *EB* videos during Phases Zero and the early part of Phase One had not invited

viewers to create their own videos, become a part of the show nor direct viewers to watch more content via annotations.

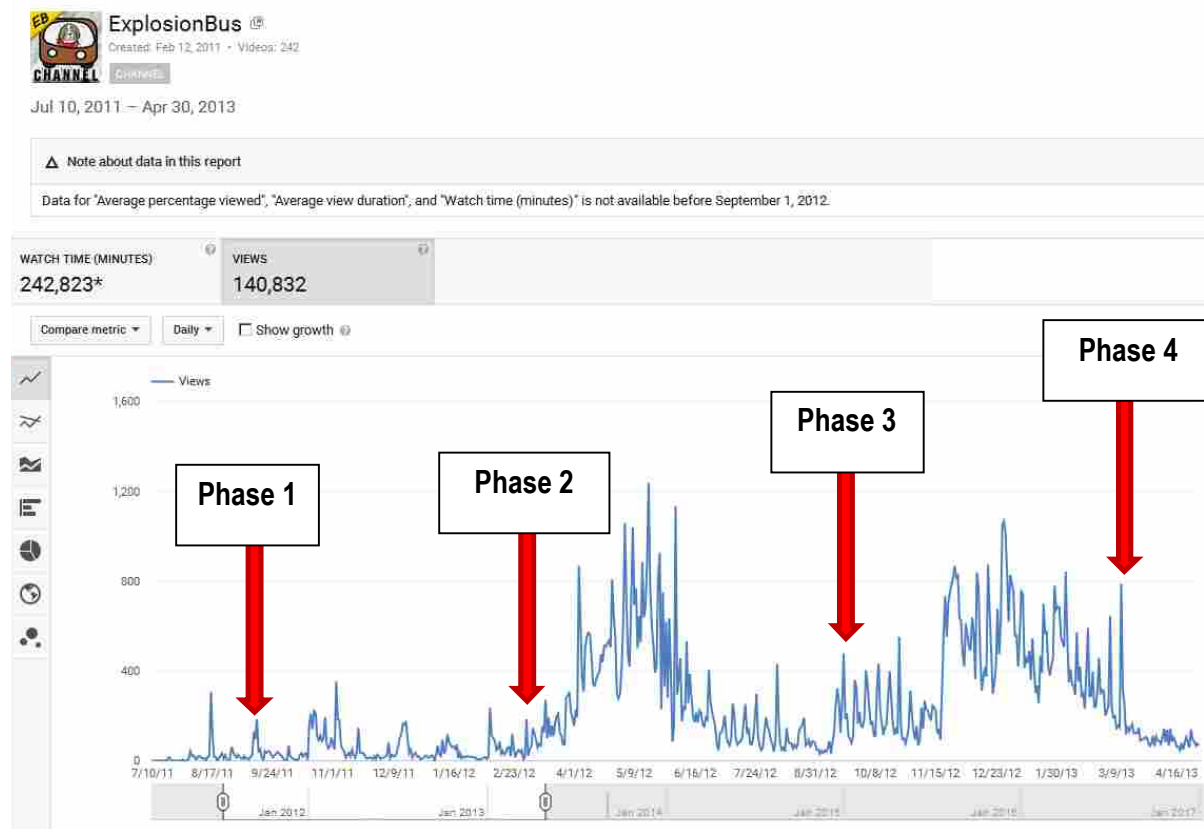


Fig. 16. Overall viewership of the *Explosion Bus* Youtube channel across all phases.

Table 31. Analytic activities requiring no login.

Activities	Phase Zero	Phase One	Phase Two	Phase Three	Phase Four¹
# of EB YouTube Videos	13 shorts	7 episodes +19 shorts + 6 auditions = 32	21 episodes +45 auditions +8 instructional /promos +7 Teachers + 8 Snyder videos = 89	20 episodes +1 promo + 3 Instruct +4 <i>Average</i> . <i>Americans</i> +7 auditions = 35	14 episodes +4 podcasts +1 short +1 Snyder video +1 <i>EB</i> 2-hour audio = 21
YouTube Views /Clicks	892 (no episodes) ²	7494 (5,696 episodes) ³	18,019 (4772 <i>episodes</i>)	51,042 (45,453 <i>episodes</i>)	10,654 all (9800 <i>episodes</i>)
Videos with Zero Comments	4 promos +4 cast auditions = 8	6 clips + 4 cast auditions +3 web auditions = 13	3 Snyder +3 instructional +22 web auditions = 28	1 (web audition)	4 (all 3 rd party podcasts)

Table 32. Percentages of videos viewed requiring no login.

Activities⁴	Phase One	Phase Two	Phase Three	Phase Four⁵
<50% Episode Viewed	*	.09523%	60%	0%
>50% Episode Viewed	*	90.4761%	40%	100%
Average Percentage of Episode Viewed	*	69.628%	51.179%	63.35%

¹ Phase Four data is based on March 30, 2014.² Data of overall views/clicks are based on all official *EB* channel videos (including promos, auditions, etc). Totals with “episodes” inside parentheses are totals that came only from the episodes.³ Episodes-5,695, web auditions-666, *EB* clips+ *Talent Scout* lectures, etc-1,133= 7,494.⁴ There were no episodes in Phase Zero, so there is no data from that phase to include in this table.⁵ Phase Four data is based on March 30, 2014.

Comparing the percentage viewed of each short episode to each longer episode is hard to do since Phase One percentages were not available. The best estimate of percentages is determined from triangulating the number of YouTube views with the “length of visits” made to ExplosionBus.com, since early *EB* YouTube videos, Twitter and Facebook posts directed Phase One viewers to the website and not to YouTube directly.

Table 33. ExplosionBus.com webpage visits requiring no login.

Activities	Phase Zero	Phase One	Phase Two	Phase Three	Phase Four ⁶
<i>EB</i> Page Visitors	217 ⁷	10,756 ⁸	5479 ⁹	-* ¹⁰	-* ¹¹
<i>EB</i> Page Views	11,496	33,880	21,703	-*	-*

At our first meeting in November 2011, Katie Covett handed me then current printouts of the most recent month of analytic data before the original ExplosionBus.com information was

⁶ Phase Four data is based on March 30, 2014.

⁷ Phase Zero Google Analytics, from July 1 2011-September 11, 2011. Google Analytics also shows an average session duration of 12:51 minutes, and a bounce rate of 27.78 percent.

⁸ Phase One Google Analytics, from September 12, 2012-March 11, 2012. Google Analytics also shows an average session duration of 2:29 minutes, and a bounce rate of 58.75 percent.

⁹ Phase Two Google Analytics, from March 12, 2012-September 17, 2012. Google Analytics also shows an average session duration of 2:30 minutes, and a bounce rate of 61.16 percent.

¹⁰ This gap of ExplosionBus.com data stems from a change in web masters and servers, from September 20, 2012-January 20, 2013 (between the original postings on the old site and the relaunch of the new site). The data for September 18 and 19 show 13 visitors, 25 page views, an average session duration of 4:51 min and a bounce rate of 46.15 percent. In spite of the lack of data, these numbers do show a decrease in visitors as time went on. The number of distinct visits was 24 and 381 in the first two phases, and 4,732 in the last three months of Phase Three. This data also shows that most of the visit durations to the ExplosionBus.com webpage were very brief. Through September 30, 2012, 16,494 visits lasted 10 seconds or less. Of the 25, 381 total visitors, A total of 1,471 visitors remained on the website for 10 minutes or more (530, for over a half-hour). During the last part of Phase Three when all the episodes were shorter (January 2012 – March 2013), the analytics show 4,732 visits, with 197 of those visits lasting 10 minutes or longer (21 over a half-hour).

¹¹ *Explosion Bus* page analytics are not included from Phase Four, as the data gap continued through the rest of this phase. The data was later tracked by talentexplosion.com following the end of Phase Four (March 30, 2012) and it shows only one visitor during this time. It was after Phase Four that I was collecting information about the website design, and no doubt my visits have increased and skewed the overall numbers. In spite of the lack of data, the numbers across each of the phases do show a decrease in visitors as time went on.

erased (when they later switched to another server). From October 10, 2011-November 9, 2011 (when the last three Phase One episodes had been posted), there had been a total of 5,441 visits to ExplosionBus.com, and most of them (2,099) had come via “Stumbleupon.com.”

StumbleUpon is a third-party curated site that recommends different types of media to its users based on their interests. As 4,039 of the 5,441 (74.23 percent) visits were less than 10 seconds long, and 61.83 percent of the traffic came from “Referring Sites,”¹² it appears that curated sites may attract visitors, but they do not guarantee interested or engaged viewers. Nearly two-thirds (64.22 percent) of the “Top Traffic Sources” came from keyword searches using “explosion” and “bus.” Of the 5,441 overall visits on the website at this time, only 201 visits went past the length of the 20-minute episodes (from 10-30 min) and only 70 visits lasted over 30 minutes. During this 30-day period of Phase One, the total number of visitors that were on the webpage long enough to view an entire episode was less than five percent. Through the entire period of Phase One, there had been 10,756 visits to ExplosionBus.com with 33,880 individual page views.

So, since in one month of data, only five percent of viewers stayed on the page long enough to view a complete 20-minute episode, compared to 90.4761 percent of videos viewed in Phase Two with an average of 69.628 percent content viewed, my assumption is that the average percentage of each episode viewed increased in Phase Two, especially since the Phase Two episodes were, on average, only one-third of the length than in Phase One. It may not have been a “viral” global expansion, but the number of views of Phase Two episodes within a six-month period was substantially higher than in the six-months comprising Phase One.

¹² From Google Analytics, “Traffic Sources Overview” October 10, 2011 – November 9, 2011 from ExplosionBus.com.

Table 34. Analytic activities requiring a login.

Activities	Phase Zero	Phase One	Phase Two	Phase Three	Phase Four
Disliked	-	9	1 episode only (17)	(12 from episodes) 20 total	All 5 from episodes
Liked	10	68	(103 from episodes) 430 total	(523 from episodes) 668 total	251 (233 from episodes)
Subscribed	1	44 (after February 22)	(68 episodes only) 201 total	(276 from episodes) 286 total	All 24 from episodes

The educational practice of expressing expectations also yielded measurable results. Alerting viewers of expectations within the closing credits of the episodes and guiding viewers to subscribe did result in viewers clicking on annotations and subscribing to or viewing more material on the YouTube channel. As regular viewers discovered and returned to the show, more of them began to express a deeper appreciation of the series, as seen in the growth of nuanced comments in all categories (negative, neutral and positive). Opinions that offered constructive criticism were both coded as negative and positive in the overall tally.

Table 35. Qualitative activities in the form of comments.

Activities	Phase Zero	Phase One	Phase Two	Phase Three	Phase Four ¹³
# of EB	13 shorts	7 episodes	21 episodes	20 episodes	14 episodes
YouTube		+19 shorts +	+45	+1 promo	+4 podcasts
Videos		6 auditions = 32	auditions +8 instructional /promos +7 Teachers + 8 Snyder videos = 89	+ 3 Instruct +4 <i>Average Americans</i> +7 auditions = 35	+1 short +1 Snyder video +1 <i>EB</i> 2-hr audio = 21
Comments ¹⁴	3	25 ¹⁵	(73 episodes only) 202	(171 from episodes) 247	90 (75 from episodes)
<5 wd. Neg	-	0	1	-	-
>5 wd. Neg	-	0	5	6	3
-Constructive	-	-	-	4	3
-Troll	-	-	1	1	-
<5 wd. Neut	-	1	12	16	3
>5 wd. Neut	-	10	21	26	7
-Joke	-	1	2	2	-
-Query	-	3	1+3	1+8	2
-Understand	-	4	4	2+5	-
<5 wd. Pos	-	2	42	64	5
>5 wd. Pos	3	4	90	125	40
IntensPos	2	3	6+17	13+31	10 (plot ideas)
EB/Team	1	8	73	76	41
Comments					

There were more “negative” comments during Phases Two and Three (five and six, respectively). However, most of them expressed a constructive concern (-CC) for the show at the core of their negative comment. There were only two “-Troll” comments during all phases of this

¹³ Phase Four data is based on March 30, 2014.

¹⁴ Comments= total number of individual comments. These do not include comments by *EB* team members. Comments that depict higher levels of interest are included in the total number of comments, but also counted separately.

¹⁵ Comment data come from the extra clips. Comments from the episodes had been disabled.

case study. The same regard for Snyder/Katz productions is found in the neutral comments. Similarly, opinions that were neutral toward *Explosion Bus*, but overall positive toward other Snyder productions, were both coded as neutral and positive in the overall tally.

There was also an increase of *EB* team comments across the phases as viewer comments increased. The team comments were made either by Katie Covett or known members of the production crew. This indicates that the team was realizing that direct responses to viewer comments was an important part of their work—not just providing entertainment content. As teacher feedback is a way to decrease transactional distance to students, the team’s feedback might also have helped decrease the transactional distance with *EB* viewers.

Table 36. Qualitative activities in the form of videos.

Activities	Phase 0	Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 3	Phase 4 ¹⁶
# of <i>EB</i> YouTube Videos	13 shorts	7 episodes +19 shorts 6 auditions = 32	21 episodes +45 auditions +8 instruct /promos +7 Teachers + 8 Snyder videos = 89	20 episodes +1 promo + 3 Instruct +4 <i>Average Americans</i> +7 auditions =35	14 episodes +4 podcasts +1 short +1 Snyder videos +1 <i>EB</i> 2-hr audio = 21
<i>EB</i>/Team Comments	1	8	73	76	41
Audition Spin-off	-	5	45 1 (19 <i>episodes</i>)	7 3 series (11+43+9 = 63 episodes)	- 2 Both posted 1 episode each
Recap	-	-	-	1 (18 episodes)	-
Extra Series	-	-	-	-	1

¹⁶ Phase Four data is based on March 30, 2014.

By the end of Phase Three, nearly 10 percent of the 500 subscribers had become co-producers themselves via web auditions, once the expectation (objective) had been expressed in the opening and closing of the episodes and in Covett's "welcome" email to subscribers. By the end of Phase Three, there were 57 user-generated web audition videos posted on the *Explosion Bus* YouTube channel. Covett's email had also yielded three spin-off series and over 100 individual episodes of viewer-generated content. Considering the amount of commitment it requires to conceive, produce and post user-generated videos, this is a significant amount. In direct mail marketing, the average response is 4.4 percent, and email has typical responses of .12 percent ("Direct Marketing News," 2012, para. 1), Moving toward higher levels of engagement, HippyWoman's spin-off required "refactoring" (Mayfield) *EB* content with her recap series. In other words, she had to view the content, compose a script, edit and rework the video into a summary for each of her 18 episodes.

I added Phase Four to this case study as it contained two phenomena not seen in the other phases. Firstly, it was during Phase Four that viewers Tim Barnes and Ian Abramson demonstrated the highest level of Mayfield's Power Law of Participation, "Collaborative Intelligence" and engagement, with their post-*Explosion Bus* spin-off series, "The Pitch Show." For 10 episodes, Barnes and Abramson reversed roles with the *EB* team by becoming the producer-directors, with Snyder asked to take a subordinate role. Secondly, this phase showed how Snyder and Covett took the lessons they learned and applied them from the start of their next project, "*Homo Erectus*." This was a series of brief (approximately two minutes long), self-contained comedic portraits of types of people seen in society—"Mr. Fake Nice Guy," "My Political-Insight-Is-Better-Sourced-Than-Yoursicus," "I Don't Watch TV," etc. Without the known names of Jonathan Katz or Tom Leopold, the *Homo Erectus* episodes were not as well-

viewed, averaging 1,066 per episode over the next year (ending with the last *Homo Erectus* episode on March 30, 2014). While 100 percent of the 14 episodes had averages of over 50 percent viewership (with an average viewer duration per episode of 63.5 percent), each episode was only one and a half to two minutes long, so it did not require a huge time commitment.

Although the analytic data during Phase Four showed stronger numbers than in Phase One, the comments section provided more insight. For one thing, all of the *Homo Erectus* episodes had comments. No episode was without a viewer willing to login to YouTube to leave a comment. Phase Four also had no “-Troll” comments. *Explosion Bus* had also seen comments with every episode, although several of the user-generated web audition videos did not. Three of Snyder’s joke lectures also received no comments. Yet, in Phase Four, the number of comments that exhibited a more intense engagement had grown to 63 occurrences across all sentiments (–CC, –Joke, –Query, –U[nderstanding], and IntensePos). Within the comment section for each *Homo Erectus* episode, the *Explosion Bus* team expressed their expectations (objectives)—specifically, requesting that viewers suggest topics for future episodes.

What was noteworthy was that over the 14 *Homo Erectus* episodes, viewers contributed 10 plot ideas for future episodes. While coding for Phase Four, if a viewer contributed an idea for a future episode, I counted it as an IntensePos response. This was significant because it was part of an overall increase in positive viewer comments, which demonstrated higher engagement, a desire for more content and, as Ross Mayfield would call it, higher “Collaborative Intelligence.” On Mayfield’s Power Law of Participation continuum, these 10 plot ideas were examples of collaboration, the next to highest step of participation. On McGuire’s 13 Output Persuasion Steps,¹⁷ providing ideas for further content corresponded with both step 10 (“acting

¹⁷ Although McGuire states per a footnote in Appendix B that “Persuasion steps *typically* occur sequentially,” it is not necessarily mandatory.

on the communication”) and 11 (“Post-action cognitive integration of this behavior”) since viewers also had to pull ideas from their own experience or imagination to formulate a suggestion for a new type of “*Homo Erectus*,” to be featured in future episodes. They also needed to possess a somewhat comedic sensibility, and consider the humorous possibilities in their suggestions.

Therefore, these data support my assertion that shortening video length and expressing expectations (via annotations and instructional videos) was useful in helping expand this entertainment audience. They also offered the most measurable results of the educational suggestions that had been implemented. By telling viewers to send in video auditions and to subscribe, and by expressing to viewers that “More Subscriptions = More *Explosion Bus*,” the *EB* team had a means of assessing whether viewers were listening and if they liked the content well enough to want more. Once the team had a list of subscribers, they had a core group of people to send more direct requests to. Though the number of total subscribers was small, they were engaged enough that 10 percent would become co-producers, which is a significant amount.

QUESTION 2: HOW CAN CONTENT PROVIDERS BENEFIT FROM RECONCEPTUALIZING THE AUDIENCE AS STUDENTS?

As James G. Webster pointed out in *The Marketplace of Attention*, there is a great amount of content and other producers posting their content online. This number grows daily and yet there are still only 24 hours per day and far fewer hours available for viewers to consume media (Webster, 2014, p. 4). Therefore, any tool or conceptual framework that can help content providers speed up the process of attracting or keeping a potential audience engaged could be vital to continuing the production of that content.

The biggest benefit to the reconceptualization of audiences as students is that it reminds the content provider that there is more to attracting an audience than just “pushing” content onto the Internet. Understanding that expressing clear expectations is part of the content provider’s “work” can guide the provider with observable and measureable data streams. It also suggests that the previous conceptualization of a passive, feminized audience was possibly due to the lack of accessible communication channels or technologies that allowed viewers to talk back in direct and creative ways to content providers. Of course, for decades there have been focus groups, letters to the editor, boycotting of sponsors supporting undesirable content and ratings boxes, but creative qualitative communication streams provide additional sentiments that are now what the industry is listening to.

Giving audiences a task or a reward connected to the brand or cultural artifact augments the total experience of their media consumption. Embracing a cyclical approach to production potentially builds time into the production schedule to look not only at the analytics but the qualitative, human responses to the content. An educational perspective dictates that providers *listen* to viewers and pay attention to their *produsage*—with the viewers acting as co-producers creating and sharing their own responses within their own networks, and also back to the original content providers.

If expectations are not only expressed, but in essence built into, the construction of content (be it videos or webpages), those expectations are expressed for as long as the content is accessible and discovered. On YouTube, videos containing annotations continue to alert viewers to those “calls to action”—subscribing or direct viewers to additional media, which does not require much additional oversight. Like “passive income,” having clear expectations expressed

can yield continued benefits for years after the efforts and production expenses ceased, as we will see in a subsequent section, “Beyond Phase Four Results” (p. 235).

As we have seen in chapter four, viewership for *Explosion Bus* grew quite a bit during Phases Two and Three. During Phase One, in other social media such as Twitter and Facebook, viewers were invited to share the *EB* links, but not invited to participate in a conversation about it. Some conversation became possible when viewers found the episodes directly on YouTube via the comments section, bypassing the official website. Perhaps that is sufficient if viewership is all that is desired. YouTube now offers a subscriber button that is always visible on the page with the embedded video, helping content providers see who their more engaged viewers are.

Now that Internet content is more commonly viewed on television sets, technologies have caught up with Snyder’s original vision for *Explosion Bus*. It is entirely possible that if he chooses to make those first seven episodes available again, and given that his channel already has over 150 videos on it, the viewership should spread more quickly than it did originally.

QUESTION 3: IS EVALUATING VIEWER ACTIVITIES ENOUGH TO ASSESS ENGAGEMENT OF A CULTURAL ARTIFACT?

Despite these results from chapter four, I acknowledge that asserting a resounding “Yes,” to this last of my research questions is not possible. Along with my instructional design-driven suggestions, other outside factors prevent an assertion that instructional design concepts alone increased viewership and participation. There are five challenges that challenge such a claim:

1. When I submitted my input to the *EB* team, I had not disclosed to Snyder or Covett that I was basing my suggestions on my training with the Quality Matters rubric or instructional design practices. Therefore, the *EB* team did not have this framework in mind as they implemented my suggestions.

It is possible that had the team embraced an instructional framework, it might have impacted their decisions and activities more quickly or readily. Embracing such a framework might have resulted in higher viewership earlier than it did.

Nevertheless, the suggestions I offered the team were indeed informed by my instructional design training, and my own conceptualization of this entertainment context as similar to that of a teacher-student relationship in an online course. Therefore, the implemented suggestions starting in the latter half of Phase One stemmed from instructional design concepts. The fact that viewership grew more quickly during these subsequent phases, and the fact that viewers directly responded to expressed expectations, cannot rule out these changes as possible catalysts for increased engagement.

2. Members of the team were also making decisions regarding the designs and formats of the webpage and episodes, which might have impacted viewership:
 - a. The naming conventions of the Phase Two and Three series: “*Origin Story #1, #2,*” etc., and, later, “*One Night Stand,*” “*Strip Club*” and “*Smokin’ Hot.*”
 - b. The choice of somewhat sexually provocative thumbnail graphics to indicate the events within each video.
3. Three of the episodes with provocative titles were also linked to third-party recommendations, which had their own articulated viewing networks. These third party websites and podcasts that promoted the series offered more exposure outside of the *Explosion Bus* channel.

At certain times, this clearly impacted viewership. Snyder posted four third-party podcasts on the *Explosion Bus* channel that had featured interviews with him and/or Jonathan Katz. These podcasts had originally been distributed outside of the *Explosion Bus* YouTube

channel. At three points during Phase Four, there were notable jumps in visits to the *Explosion Bus* YouTube channel. The third highest viewing day was October 26, 2013 (1,758 views). The next highest was May 3, 2013 (2,244 views). The biggest date for YouTube visits to the *Explosion Bus* channel was on September 5, 2013. According to the analytics, most of the viewers were watching *Episode 2: "Prom"* (22,339 views) and *The Explosion Bus –The Trailer* (36,228 views). These two episodes were linked to an online article called *4 Brilliant '90s Shows You Didn't Know Are Still Being Made* (Cheese, 2013), which was posted on the humor website Cracked.com. *Dr. Katz: Professional Therapist* was rated number one of the four shows mentioned in the article, and received glowing reviews for the original Katz series as well as *Explosion Bus*. The feature on Cracked.com was the best promotion of *Explosion Bus* through all the phases due to its own large viewing network.

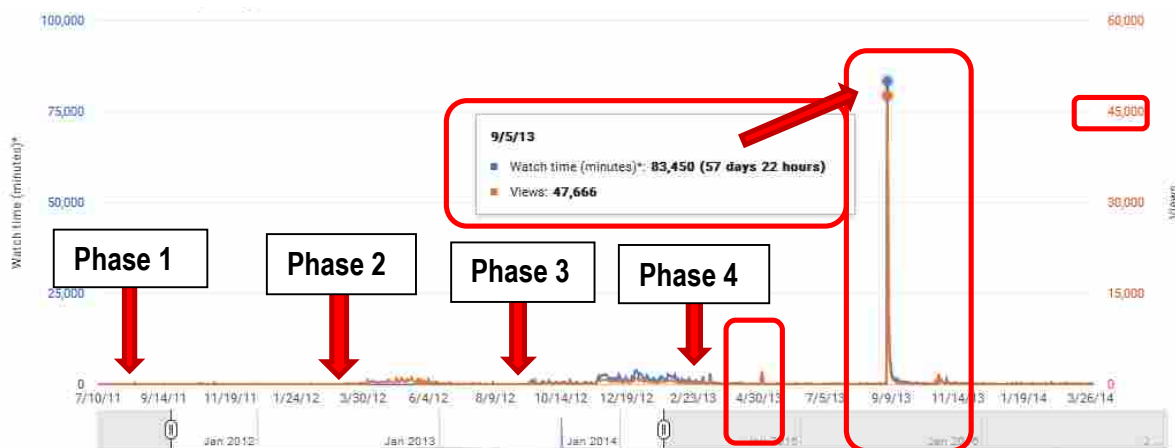


Fig. 17. Increased viewership on 5 Sept 2013 with Cracked.com feature. Screenshot by author.

On April 12, 2012, Cracked’s general manager, Oren Katzeff, claimed to KPCC radio in Southern California that the humor site was attracting “about 17-million unique [viewers], and 300-million page views” as of February of that year alone (Osborne, 2013). The number of viewers who saw the *Explosion Bus* article from September 5, 2013 was up to 895,279 as of the end of January 2017.¹⁸ Comparing the number of the top two videos, the third highest-viewed video that day was *Episode 1: “One Night Stand,”* with only 3,637 views—between 10 percent and 16 percent of the other highest-viewed videos that day. This episode had not been featured on any third-party sites. However, *One Night Stand* was linked as a “Click to Watch” annotation at the end of *Prom*. Viewers who finished *Prom* were given the option to watch *One Night Stand* or *Origin Story #27*. Of the 20 comments on *Prom*’s YouTube page, three viewers mentioned having been directed there via Cracked.

Another provocatively titled episode, *Episode 8: “Smokin’ Hot”* was not linked to any third-party websites and therefore received substantially fewer views (6,879) than the other (provocatively titled or not) episodes linked to curated recommendations. *Smokin’ Hot* also earned just 22 subscribers with an average of 45.84 percent of the video viewed.¹⁹ This echoes Steven Rosenbaum’s thesis in *Curation Nation* regarding the importance of recommendations from knowledgeable sources (Rosenbaum, 2011, p. 3). Content that has been culled and “consecrated” by regarded “cultural intermediaries,” as Bourdieu would refer to it (Bourdieu, 1993), demonstrates a great deal of cultural capital in society. Popular third-party websites that vet media content indeed create a type of shortcut for viewers looking for worthwhile media. Attempts to make media more user-friendly, whether following educational practices or not, are ineffectual if few viewers can find the content to begin with.

¹⁸ Cracked.com keeps a running track of views displayed on each article page, in the same way YouTube does.

¹⁹ As of 31 Oct 2016.

Ep. 2 “Prom” garnered the second highest number of subscribers (163), some of which were Cracked.com readers. One comment read, “Well it made me smile and laugh, the whole time! It was fun enough that I hit the subscribe button halfway in the episode” (Timothy Dalbeck, 2014). Yet again, there was evidence that a curated recommendation did not necessarily lead to audience engagement. A negative “-Troll” comment came from a Cracked.com reader: “Am I supposed to watch this while high/drun? I didn't even smile. Bad recommendation, Cracked” (Hylianola, 2014).

The third highest number of subscribers (86) came from *EB Origin Story #1*, which was the episode viewers would see on the *Explosion Bus* webpage when they “saved the date” for the beginning of the new season in Phase Two. It could have been that expressing the expectation that viewers return to the website on March 11, 2012 resulted in the highest number of views for the first Phase Two *EB Origin Story* (7,701), as opposed to the rest of Phase Two, which saw each episode averaging 1,258 views (or 16 percent of the first Phase Two episode) per episode.

On the subject of episode titles, episodes entitled “*EB Origin Story*” followed by an episode number (and no title) did not draw many new viewers to the show via YouTube. These titles were originally changed to distinguish content extracted from the longer Phase One versions and newer, shorter Phase Two episodes that had not been extracted from Phase One. Once the Phase Two episodes were available, the original longer versions were hidden from the public. The Phase Two titles were not clearer because it was originally expected that viewers would be accessing the videos directly from the *Explosion Bus* website and not from a specific search on YouTube. When thematic titles were added to the episode numbers in Phase Three as they had been in Phase One—i.e., *One Night Stand*, *Prom*, *The Nigerian Prince*, *Las Vegas*, *Gun Control*, etc.—the average number of views jumped from 1,258 to 4,340 per episode (nearly

three and a half times the viewership), when not including the videos linked to third-party websites and podcasts.

Related to the influence of third-party postings, there was one more phenomenon during Phase One that I initially had trouble explaining, as it did not seem to correlate with any instructional design approaches I had suggested, nor third party posts. The *Explosion Bus* episode that attracted the most viewers during Phase One was *Explosion Bus: Ep. 5 - "Bus out of Control,"* with 4,929 views within the first six months of posting. This was when the average number of views for the other six uncurated episodes across the first six months was only 125 views.

During the early part of Phase One, when the long-form *Explosion Bus* episodes were posted, the *EB* team utilized the curated site StumbleUpon.com to recommend the ExplosionBus.com webpage. This resulted in a three-week upsurge of webpage visits between October 11 (when *Explosion Bus: Ep. 5* was posted) and October 31, 2011, with an average of 216 daily visits. The total number of StumbleUpon referrals during Phase One was 3,190 (3,130 + 60, according to Google Analytics). However, the “bounce rate” or number of one-page visits was over 75 percent. In other words, the majority of ExplosionBus.com visitors coming via StumbleUpon.com lasted less than 12 seconds and browsed no farther than the first page of ExplosionBus.com.

The episode five video was also embedded in www.marybeemusic.com, the website of the featured auditioning act in this episode—singer Mary Bee. However, the link on her website connected viewers directly to the YouTube channel URL and bypassed the ExplosionBus.com website entirely. So, viewers finding this episode on Mary Bee’s webpage would not have registered on the ExplosionBus.com analytics. Turning to the YouTube analytics, of the 4,929

viewers for episode five, 3,102²⁰ visits had come directly from embedded or external websites (most likely, the combination of Mary Bee’s and ExplosionBus.com) and 1,352 had come from direct YouTube searches. The curated sites generated most of the 4,929 visitors, but they do not fully explain the 1,352 viewers who had conducted a YouTube search.

Table 37. Google Analytics’ Traffic Source Locations for “*Explosion Bus: Ep. 5 Bus Out of Control.*”

Traffic Source Type	Views
Direct or unknown	1,370
YouTube channels	8
YouTube search	1,352
Google search	8
Suggested videos	425
Other YouTube features	33
External	1,732
Unknown – embedded player	1

It is most likely that those 1,352 viewers might have been searching for one or more of the keywords associated with the episode, either “Explosion,” “Bus” or “Bus Out of Control.” To determine this, I utilized Google Trends (www.trends.google.com), a Google service offering data on the patterns of searches on Google.com and its related subcategories (web, image, news, shopping and YouTube). For each date, Google Trends calculates the percentage of the highest day’s search with that particular search term. In Google Trends, the dates during Phase One with the most searches for “bus out of control” were October 17, 2011 (99 percent of the number of the highest search), November 18, 2011 (100 percent, the highest date with this search), February

²⁰ 1,370 Direct or unknown + 1,732 External (Google or other search engine) searches—Based on Google Analytics.

1, 2012 (89 percent) and February 13, 2012 (88 percent)²¹ Google searches with terms “Mary Bee Music” or *Explosion Bus: Ep. 5 “Bus out of Control”* did not even register as a Google Trend. On YouTube only searches, trends.google.com reveal the two top dates people searched for “bus out of control” on YouTube during Phase One were January 10, 2012 (80 percent) and February 13, 2012 (76 percent) with no searches for “Mary Bee Music” or *Explosion Bus: Ep. 5 “Bus out of Control.”* When searching for “bus out of control 2011” without the rest of the title, but narrowing the search for the year that episode was released, YouTube reveals 2,260,000 searches on YouTube. However, there were only 350,000 searches for “*Explosion Bus 2011*” on YouTube. Although that is still a fairly high number, “bus out of control 2011” had nearly six and a half times the number of searches as “*Explosion Bus 2011*” did. It is therefore likely that the additional 1,352 searches might have come from unrelated searches for a “bus out of control.” As said in chapter four (p. 153), Snyder had even played with this possibility in the story when the *EB* characters named their website ExplosionBus.com and one day found it had a million hits because people were searching for information regarding an unrelated explosion on a bus.

Returning to the outside factors that prevent an assertion that my suggestions alone increased viewership and participation—

4. Not all of my suggestions were implemented, probably because they were too time-consuming for a small team to manage.

a. The team did not tell viewers to get on an *Explosion Bus* email list.

²¹ <https://trends.google.com/trends/explore?date=2011-09-02%202012-03-30&q=%22Bus%20out%20of%20control%22>

As stated, this suggestion was adapted by having YouTube users subscribe to the *Explosion Bus* Channel. However, this complicated and impeded communications with viewers who had no YouTube account.

- b. The team did not create a user discussion forum or message board on the *Explosion Bus* website where viewers could start their own conversation threads.

Since the *Explosion Bus* universe was originally created to be serialized and narratively complicated, opportunities for finding out more about the story needed to be provided. Henry Jenkins would agree that “a dense text encourages its fans to become foragers for information (Rose 2011), which they then bring back together as they construct online reference sites to guide others’ experiences” (Jenkins, 2013, p. 136). If fans do not create off-shoot sites, content providers might want to “provide fans with the resources they need to talk about the program” (Jenkins, 2013, p 136). At the very least, it makes it easier for content providers to follow fan conversations if they offer forums within their own website—reconceptualizing the audience as students might have signaled a need to the content provider for a centralized discussion board. The *Explosion Bus* website offered viewers a space to comment on the reviews page, below Tony Lovell’s reviews of the Phase One episodes. However, these two approaches to my suggestions were not fostering “instructor-student, content-student and, if appropriate to the course, student-student interaction” (QM standard 5.2). Visitors could not initiate conversations on any topic of their choosing. The comments section did not allow for threads to direct visitors through a chronological development of discussion with each other.

Most YouTube users know that each video page on YouTube offers a space for viewers to make comments and respond to other comments below each video. However, it is difficult for

viewers to initiate discussions *not* related to the video immediately above the comment. This is because although they can theoretically make comments about any topic, it would be difficult for other viewers to find a coherent thread on an unrelated topic without its being located in an organized forum. It is difficult though to determine if having a centralized discussion area would have been more utilized, since many viewers stopped visiting the webpage as time went on. The lack of a discussion forum might have played into the growing lack of interest in the webpage.

5. One last outside factor possibly influencing viewer engagement was the mere fact that the amount of *Explosion Bus* channel content was growing. It is possible that as more episodes and videos appeared on the *Explosion Bus* YouTube channel, there were more opportunities for viewers to find or “spill into” these videos.

I did not design my case study to double check this possibility, but it is a factor worth considering.

BEYOND PHASE FOUR RESULTS

Looking at the quantitative data during each phase helped to impact decisions for subsequent phases, but I began to wonder if interest had continued or even sped up after the *Explosion Bus* and *Homo Erectus* episodes had ended. Since the content was still available and the Internet is a synaptic rhizome, I felt it was necessary to dig deeper beyond the phases I originally intended to measure. Subscriber numbers continued to increase (slowly) after Phase Three ended and measuring the full impact had to include revisiting the data. I, therefore, decided to collect quantitative data at two more cycles following the end of Phase Four—July 2015 and December 2016—and note any changes during those periods.

The episode which had the most views during Phase Three had been *Ep. 1: “One Night Stand”* (9,221 views), but as of July 2015, it had slipped to number three, with 20,185 views. In

second place was the 28th episode, pulled from the last of the seven dissected “origin story” episodes. It was now called *Origin Story #28: “Strip Club”* and had enticed 23,662 views by July 2015. The video with the highest views of all *Explosion Bus* Channel content in July 2015 was now *Ep. 2: Prom*, with 30,339 views. The fourth highest viewed video was the first uncurated video in the list, attracting only 7,928 views. The top three videos with views in the tens of thousands no doubt occurred because of the links to the two articles on Cracked.com and the annotation to *One Night Stand* after *Prom*.

Table 38. Top 10 viewed videos by July 2015.

No.	Top 10 Episodes (date posted)	Length	Average View Time (in minutes)	Views
1.	Ep. 2 “Prom” (November 17, 2012)	6.35	2.5	30,339
2.	EB Origin Story #28 “Strip Club” (October 29, 2012)	4.72	1.5	23,662
3.	Ep. 1 “One Night Stand” (November 10, 2012)	6.55	2.9	20,185
4.	Ep. 10 “Yoga” (January 28, 2013)	6.38	2.7	7,928
5.	Teachers Lounge: “Parent Conferences (May 3, 2012)	1.97	1.1	7,892
6.	Ep. 3 “The Nigerian Prince” (November 26, 2012)	5.93	3.2	7,816
7.	EB Origin Story #1 (March 12, 2012)	6.02	3.1	7,469
8.	Ep. 4 “Period” (December 4, 2012)	6.22	3.2	6,478
9.	Ep. 5 “Bus out of Control” (October 11, 2011)	18.75	-*	4,929
10.	Ep. 5 ²² “Comedy Writers” (December 10, 2012)	6.48	3.4	4,760

²² Both 9 and 10 were labeled Episode 5, but the one from October 10, 2011 was a longer episode. The one from December 10, 2012 was approximately 6.5 minutes long.

Table 39. Top 10 viewed videos by December 2016.

No.	Top 10 Episodes (date posted)	Length	Average View Time (in minutes)	Views
1.	EB Origin Story #28 “Strip Club”	4.72	1.5	99,413
2.	Explosion Bus - The Trailer	1.05	0.8	40,034
3.	Ep. 2 “Prom”	6.35	2.5	32,150
4.	Ep. 1 “One Night Stand”	6.55	2.9	30,625
5.	Ep. 3 "The Nigerian Prince"	5.93	3.2	8,407
6.	Ep. 10 "Yoga"	6.38	2.7	8,326
7.	Teachers Lounge: "Parent Conferences"	1.97	1.1	7,994
8.	Ep. 4 "Period"	6.22	3.2	7,888
9.	EB Origin Story #1	6.02	3.1	7,701
10.	EB Origin Story #29	6.20	2	7,319

Between 2015 and 2016, the top two episodes had flipped spots. *Prom* was in second place in December 2016 with 40,034 views and *Strip Club* topped the views with 99,413. The total length of the *Prom* and *Strip Club* episodes were 4.72 minutes and 6.35 minutes, respectively. However, the average length of episode viewed was one and a half minutes (or 32.11 percent) for *Prom*, and two and a half minutes for *Strip Club* (or 39.07 percent), meaning the majority of viewers had moved on by the halfway point. Additionally, by December 2016, *Strip Club* had yielded 189 likes (222 added, but 33 likes removed by the viewer), and 33 subscribers added with one subscriber removed of 2,937 total *Explosion Bus* channel subscribers with 64 dislikes and eight comments.

These figures suggest that Covett’s approach for creating somewhat “salacious” titles might have been effective in attracting initial viewer attention. However, the problem with such titles is that they do not “deliver” on the expectations of viewers searching with certain keywords. Posting content with misleading titles may pull in viewers, but it does not foster

engagement. This also ties in (albeit loosely) with QM learning objectives standards that require expressed expectations be accurate and descriptive of the content. Clearly entitled content will direct the viewer more successfully.

The ExplosionBus.com webpage analytics listed exact sites where visitors came from (i.e., links from Twitter or Facebook, etc.) but, unfortunately, YouTube's traffic source analytics do not get that granular. YouTube lists a lot of information about individual viewer activities, but they only broadly categorize the types of source locations—i.e., YouTube watch page, mobile devices, embedded in external websites and apps, YouTube other, etc. It would have been useful to have the actual webpages or search terms included in these analytics, but since they were not available, there needs to be another way to analyze the data.

In December 2016, the top three videos that had been linked from Cracked.com averaged 50,555 views per episode. It therefore appears that entertainment videos spread more rapidly via curated recommendations than because of educational practices. However, to some degree, the expectations or uses and gratifications of viewers may not have been met as readily. When comparing curated “average view duration” to uncurated, the viewers who have either looked more directly for this media, or who have stumbled upon it without a curated recommendation, tend to watch more of the video than those with a recommendation (49.373 percent curated versus 38.646 percent uncurated). The exception was *Explosion Bus – The Trailer* recommended in the Cracked.com feature. It averaged 77.12 percent content viewed but, again, this was only a one-minute promotional trailer, and not a full-length episode. Viewers clicking on a “trailer” typically expect it to be an overview, and brief.

When examining the other top-viewed episodes on the day the Cracked.com feature was posted (September 5, 2013), the episodes annotated at the end of *Ep. 2: "Prom,"* gained the most

viewers (22,339) over the first five days of the Cracked.com’s posting, but the lowest “average percentage viewed” at 34 percent. It is interesting to note that at the end of the episode was text reading “Click to Watch Another Episode” with annotations to two other links. One annotation had a label: “Click to Watch ‘*One Night Stand*.’” The other annotation had no label, but sent the viewer to *Origin Story #27*. *One Night Stand* was the third most-watched video during the July 2015 collection of data, and fourth most-watched in December 2016. Yet, *Origin Story #27*, also linked from *Prom*, did not place in the top 10 of either list. This suggests the importance of naming conventions and labeling annotations so viewers know what content they are being directed to. *Explosion Bus – The Trailer* garnered 36,228 views the first week of the Cracked article, followed by *Ep. 1: One Night Stand*” with only 3,647 views but 61 percent of the percentage viewed. So, in spite of the fact that *Prom* had the most “watch time” in aggregated minutes, because the minutes were spread across 22,339 viewers, the average percentage viewed comes to 34 percent. The third highest-viewed video that had not been linked to Cracked.com, but rather at the end of the video linked to Cracked.com, had a much higher percentage of 61 percent, showing that those viewers who finished *Prom* exhibited higher engagement.

Video	Watch time (minutes) ↓	Views	Average view duration	Average percentage viewed
Ep. 2 "Prom"	48,290 (35%)	22,339 (30%)	2:09	34%
Explosion Bus - The Trailer	29,437 (21%)	36,228 (49%)	0:48	77%
Ep. 1 "One Night Stand"	14,602 (11%)	3,647 (5.0%)	4:00	61%

Fig. 18. Top three videos the week the Cracked.com feature was posted. Screenshot by author.

Looking again at the chart above of the top 10 viewed by December 2016 (pg. 21), *EB Origin Story #28 "Strip Club"* had the highest number of views (99,413), but the lowest

percentage viewed (32.11 percent) and only 32 subscribers. *Ep: 1: "One Night Stand"* had 30,625 views and a higher percentage of video viewed (44.76 percent). It also supplied the highest number of subscribers (304) to the *EB* channel. So, when estimating where these views might have come from, *Prom* and *The Trailer* (linked to Cracked) received the greatest viewership from "Unknown – embedded player," (49,700 or 68 percent of all views) in just the first five days after the article was posted. So, initially, most of the viewers were coming from Cracked. In the five days after Cracked.com's article, *Origin Story #28: "Strip Club"* had only (by comparison) 31 views or only 2.5 percent of all playback locations from an "Embedded in external websites and apps" location. In fact, *Strip Club* received 79 percent of its 978 views from a YouTube watch page. As time went on, *Strip Club*, although originally posted earlier than the others, gained most of its 99,000+ views (53 percent) from "direct or unknown" sources over a fairly steady pace and not from embedded external websites. This suggests that overtime, viewers were not finding *Strip Club* because of Cracked's recommendation, but via a more direct way, possibly from an email URL, copy/pasting the URL or by using the key words *Strip Club* as a search.

CONTENT PROVIDER LESSONS LEARNED

In broadcasting, someone else is in charge of the promotion. Online content providers control it. Snyder learned that he loves creating more than self-promotion in spite of the flexibility of format, length and content he has online (Cooke & Snyder, 2016).

Working more closely with the audience, Covett had more reflections about the lessons learned from social media (Cooke & Covett, 2016). Although Covett had done an excellent job in providing a corporate face to the audience, Covett feels that if members of the cast or Snyder himself had been more comfortable with social media interaction, there might have been higher

numbers of engaged viewers. I agree, as in my capacity as a media consultant, I have seen other content providers post regularly and interact via social media platforms and the result is higher numbers of engaged viewers. If the content provider-audience relationship does not flow naturally out of the creators or someone in charge of social media as it relates to the brand, social media can feel corporate, forced or mercenary to viewers looking for a personal connection to the brand.

Over time, Covett developed an appreciation for building a community and found it a fun part of the work. However, she recognizes that it takes time and resources to really build relationships. Covett also saw that during Phase One, the team did not think to promote too much in advance of what was next. Announcements were made just as changes were rolled out. Covett acknowledges that the audience wants and needs to know what's coming. In Phase One, "That wasn't in our head to do," says Covett (Cooke & Covett, 2016).

Beyond the banner on the *Explosion Bus* webpage, which mentioned "From the Creators of Dr. Katz," the team also had not tied *Explosion Bus* to other past endeavors of Snyder, Katz or Leopold in order to attract members of their core audiences. There were viewers, though, who made associations of *EB* to Katz's former work in *Squigglevision*, *Dr. Katz: Professional Therapist* and *Home Movies*. However, in Phase Three, Covett was realizing the importance of communication and interaction with the audience. This includes showing parts of the production process to viewers and inviting them to participate in the show. This was somewhat problematic, as Snyder already had written the outline of the overall story and did not need to involve the audience in suggestions with the plot. However, in Phase Three, the team found another way to involve viewers by asking them for input regarding locations the *Explosion Bus* would be traveling to in the story. Cartoon versions of *Explosion Bus* viewers were literally drawn in as

“extras” in the location backgrounds. If the story had the bus traveling to Duluth, Montana, the team asked the audience in Duluth via social media (Twitter & Facebook), where to set a particular scene that would be a recognizable location to local and outside viewers.

Covett also saw that taking advantage of keywords and word searches would have been useful. Covett also saw benefits of considering “What’s trending today? How can we make *Explosion Bus* relevant in terms of what’s happening *this hour*?” and find ways to integrate the brand with trending topics on social media (Cooke & Covett, 2016).

Snyder concluded that since viewers did not visit the ExplosionBus.com webpage, “The biggest lesson was to put it on an established platform and not try and create my own platform” (Cooke & Snyder, 2016). The decrease of interest in the webpage could have come from the videos’ stepping away from reminding viewers the webpage was there. The data showed a lot of visits when the team were soliciting web auditions, but the webpage was not mentioned nor annotated in the Phase Two or Phase Three versions of the *Explosion Bus* episodes. Online viewers change over time, and often they consume so much content that repeated reminders of expectations clearly help viewers from forgetting the *Explosion Bus* webpage was still active. The most valuable input for *Explosion Bus* to both Covett and Snyder was to make the episodes shorter and to make them more self-contained. This input, however, drastically changed the original goal of the show, with parallel and twisting plot complications, and a sense of mystery as to the story’s trajectory.

So was creating shorter, self-contained content a correct approach? In 2011-2013, people were not quite yet viewing long formatted entertainment content online, so shorter content was probably useful to attract a few more viewers and promote the show. However, with the lessons learned, and the development and popularization of technologies such as Chromecast, Amazon

Firestick, Roku and streaming services such as Netflix and Amazon Prime, which display Internet content on a television set via the cable television provider, the Internet might actually be better suited now for Snyder's longer, twisting *Explosion Bus* narrative.

Certainly, a tool that could have answered my research questions more directly would have been to send out a series of surveys at the beginning of each phase of *Explosion Bus*, asking viewers about the episode formats and webpage content. This would have been helpful for my project, but I was not in a position to disrupt or stop Snyder's creative output while we would have had to wait for survey responses. I was more interested in looking at what hints of engagement are measurable within viewer responses. I was also expecting the smaller content providers would not be interested in investing time and resources to develop and plough through viewer surveys. Still, triangulating the qualitative and quantitative responses with surveys would have been a better approach.

SUMMARY: RESEARCH QUESTIONS ANSWERED

So, can utilizing an educational tool help increase audience engagement to the point that more of them will view the content, participate in creative acts (become co-producers) and consequently help in the expansion of the audience? The data above suggest, "Yes." After the intervention of instructional design practices, more viewers viewed *EB* content, more viewers viewed more content, more responded to annotations, more participated in creative acts, and the audience did grow. Was it a viral expansion? No.

Because the Internet is rhizomatic, and smaller subnetworks tend to articulate for only brief periods of time, it is difficult to assert unequivocally that viewer activities and creative responses provide a complete picture of audience engagement. This is because not everyone participates. Not everyone has the resources or creative skillset to co-produce an entire spin-off

video series. Not everyone thinks a measurable response is necessary. An engagement level for “lurkers” (“silent” viewers who leave no qualitative data) is not measurable, outside of analytic data, which only counts the clicks, the locations or the alleged demographics of viewers who are not logged in. As with Nielsen ratings, analytic data does not measure how or why viewers consume media. Lurkers provide no measurable indication of the level of engagement with content, although repeated viewing for long intervals can give content providers a sense that a viewer must be engaged or even enjoying their content. However incomplete, assessing viewer activities does provide an information stream (an inexpensive one at that), especially when the content provider specifically requests certain activities such as clicking on an annotation or creating a web audition, which makes it also impossible to unequivocally dismiss.

In my interviews with Snyder and Covett, I asked if entertainment content providers could benefit from conceptualizing their viewing audience as students. Covett agreed that “letting the audience know their expectations as well as knowing more about us” was definitely helpful. Snyder, whose career had included teaching, said “Definitely! I feel toward my audience the way I feel toward the students; I am letting you in very gently to a story here that I think is going to be so worth it. But the students have to come back by law” (Cooke & Snyder, 2016),

Content providers who maintain a conceptual framework that they have goals, objectives, agendas or expectations of their audiences realize they must communicate these expectations clearly to their viewers. Conceptualizing the audience as students provides content providers a sort of “short hand” that shows them the cyclical nature of their relationship with audiences and that there should be a means to assessing if their objectives are being achieved. The Phase Three episodes displayed a final graphic before the closing credits that read, “More subscribers = more *Explosion Bus*.” As of January 2017, the number of subscribers had grown to 2,940, in spite of

the fact that *Explosion Bus* ended in 2013, and *Homo Erectus* in 2014. Should Snyder produce any more content, he now has a few thousand viewers in his core audience waiting for it.

Therefore, entertainment can borrow from educational practices. User-generated activities do provide a means of assessing and qualifying quantitative data. An instructional conceptualization might improve content providers' connection with their audiences and inspire audience members to respond with their own creative acts. These responses might serve as an additional means to expanding the viewing community within a highly cluttered Internet.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION—SIGNIFICANCE, FUTURE STUDY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

INTRODUCTION

In this dissertation, I followed the activities of a single content provider and an online viewing community surrounding a web-based comedy series over time. In my Literature Review, I drew theoretical framing from diverse fields including social sciences, psychology, communications and education. I also examined research from traditional television broadcasting, marketing, audience assessment and measurement, sentiment analysis, network theories and online pedagogical practices. In my Methods, I divided the network activities into phases flowing from content provider decisions and activities to viewer decisions and activities back to the content provider, as I was interested in the impact of applying educational principles to the design and formatting of entertainment content. In the first complete phase, viewer feedback came in the form of quantitative data and from suggestions I offered stemming from online course review training I received as an e-learning developer and doctoral student. Feedback in subsequent phases came in the form of a continuum of quantitative and qualitative activities ranging from low to high engagement in the viewing network. This cyclical flow of data analysis also echoes course development practices in online education. As the data supported in my Implementation and Results chapter, the implemented suggestions did appear to have a positive impact on viewer engagement activities as instances of higher-level activities increased across the phases.

In this final chapter, I identify major conclusions and implications of my findings to the fields of entertainment, education and English studies. I also make recommendations to other producers of online entertainment, practitioners and researchers of new media and

communications studies, English studies, cultural studies, and to educators within all of these fields.

SIGNIFICANCE

One of the things this study revealed was the potential for changing the direction of research in educational and new media. Historically, there has been a lot of scholarship on educational standards, objectives, paradigms and institutions informing practices in educational television shows, typically for children. Pedagogical principles guide *The Sesame Workshop* (formerly known as the Children’s Television Workshop) and its creation of *Sesame Street* and *The Electric Company* several decades ago. Later on, other television programs were created in response to the Children’s Television Act of 1990 (“H.R.1677, 1990),¹ which required that networks “increase the amount of educational and informational programming for children available on television” (“FCC,” 2016, para 2). These contexts have been well documented (Calvert & Kotler, 2003, Kunkel, 1991, Kunkel & Goette, 1997, Singer & Singer, 2001). What is typical of the research has been the emphasis on adapting informative content for broadcast, and educating viewers while (hopefully) entertaining them.

However, in this case study, this approach has been flipped—from the application of entertainment principles for an educational context, to the application of educational principles for an entertainment context. I did not use an educational framework to guide educational programming, but rather an educational framework to guide the design of entertainment and audience interactions. We can change direction because online affordances allow a two-way conversation to be more direct, as it has traditionally been in distance education. What was also unique was flipping the use of an educational tool such as a rubric to an entertainment context. I am certain the developers of ADDIE or the Quality Matters rubric had no idea that concepts from

¹ <https://www.congress.gov/bill/101st-congress/house-bill/01677>

their reviewer training would inform some of the suggestions I made to this non-educational context. Such an appropriation might generate a similar approach for other entertainment content providers, with the added benefit of the data from this dissertation demonstrating that such a framework can play a part in enhancing audience involvement, connectedness and engagement.

What was also unique about this case study is that my research was not applied on a corporate level, but as suggestions made by a single media consultant to a single content provider who was not obliged to have his content meet any government-dictated standards of learning. *Explosion Bus* was originally designed to draw viewers in to a lengthy, twisting narrative, with the sole goal of telling a long storyline in a unique and entertaining way. As in English studies, most of what is regarded as great “literature” starts from a single person (artist, author or composer) who has the desire to create a composition, or who was working as a hired author providing content for someone else. The idea of content becoming an object worthy of study is something that is externally bestowed (or as Bourdieu would say, “consecrated”) upon content by primarily third-party, cultural intermediaries.

With regard to borrowing educational practices for entertainment contexts, this study revealed that small content providers could benefit from a framework that reminds them that the relationship to their audience is composed of a direct, two-way dialog not possible in traditional “push” broadcasting. Paying attention, listening and responding to easily accessible “free” data (“free” in the sense that they are already included in most commercial domain management tools) completes a digital conversation first started with the providers’ original content and reciprocated in analytic data such as numbers of views, likes, shares, subscribers, or in more qualitative forms such as comments, blogs and user-generated media. Attending to each of these activities is a necessary part of the work of an online entertainment provider.

Although audience surveys and focus groups can provide very direct answers to specific questions or concerns about entertainment content, formal opinion-mining methods can also skew the results if the research is designed poorly. For instance, “People have a natural tendency to want to be accepted and liked, and this may lead people to provide inaccurate answers to questions that deal with sensitive subjects” (“Questionnaire,” 2017, para. 25). Also, “slight modifications in question wording can affect responses” (“Questionnaire,” 2017, para. 26). With audience access to multiple digital media and compositional tools as well as the quantitative analytic features built into webpages, content providers have a lot of information they should be paying attention to. These unfiltered and natural responses provide ample feedback and a means of assessing if content is being received in the manner the content provider intended.

In addition to assisting content providers in creating content that engages audiences, another significant outcome from this dissertation could be the further cross-pollination of fields that normally do not draw from each other. This is partly due to the quality of video streaming technologies that had been a little slow to develop (uploading and sharing videos did not become popular until YouTube made it easy in 2005). Plus, the television industry was a little slower to adapt their practices to include new media and embrace this shift of its audience from “pushed” to “pulled” content. The field of education, on the other hand, has adapted well to cyberspace as it requires two-way flows of conversation between teacher and student and has moved swiftly with research in developing effective eLearning practices. Therefore, it might be useful to both the education and entertainment industries (and others) to examine how a push product such as a television show might follow some of education’s practices to engage their audiences online.

FUTURE RESEARCH

The Future of *Explosion Bus*

This dissertation concentrated on the changes that Snyder's team made to the original design and formatting of the *Explosion Bus* series. Therefore, I collected and analyzed data from audience activities that were most directly tied to the suggested changes on the *Explosion Bus* website and in the formatting of the individual episodes on YouTube. I did not include data from any other social media due to time constraints, privacy issues (such as activities in closed *Explosion Bus*-related Facebook groups), and due to not having made any suggestions to Snyder's team regarding those other platforms (such as Twitter or Instagram). Other researchers might find that including other platforms and expanding the scope of more activities around this artifact paints a more complete picture of how these changes impacted the *Explosion Bus* viewing network. It also would have been interesting to have been able to ask the *Explosion Bus* YouTube subscribers who agreed to make spin-off series about their experiences and hear more directly about how engaged they were with *Explosion Bus* and its creators. Was having a direct connection and relationship with the creators an incentive for creating the content they did?

As mentioned before, it would be interesting to see if the longer Phase One episodes were made available online again, would there be enough viewers to bring the series back and in a form that is in line with Snyder's original narrative format. In 2011, the original seven episodes were posted before many people owned integrated Internet-to-television technologies such as Amazon Firestick, Chromecast and Roku, or commercial streaming services such as Netflix, Hulu or Seeso. However, today, just a few years later, audiences have no hesitation in watching longer content streamed from the Internet on their television sets. With these streaming technologies being more pervasive, adding a few modifications to these longer *Explosion Bus*

episodes could help expand viewership quite easily—such as adding YouTube annotations directing viewers to the official *Explosion Bus* website and other related content, offering a discussion forum on the website, and displaying a subscribe button with each YouTube video (now automatically part of the YouTube interface). It is quite possible that viewership will grow even more quickly, especially if Snyder can tell the type of story he originally envisioned.

Researching Similar Contexts

Following a cyclical process of evaluation, as performed in education, offers a logical and almost narrative approach to data collection and assessment. In light of the fact that I have taken components from an educational review process and applied them to entertainment, this perhaps is the start of other research that reaches across fields to achieve similar relationships between content providers and viewers. At my dissertation defense, I was asked if a full Quality Matters rubric review process might lend itself even better to an entertainment context than an educational one. This is a good question and one that points to opportunities for further studies.

Having borrowed an educational framework for an entertainment context, what happens when we flip the results back to an educational context based on what was learned in this study, especially if the cultural artefact in question becomes an object of future academic study on its own merits? It will be interesting to see if future researchers are able to select an entertainment artefact (or series) and adapt it using several different educational review processes. Which of the pedagogical strategies support the greatest increases in audience engagement? Will there be new approaches to distance education that can be appropriated to an entertainment context?

Jenkins' *Convergence Culture* describes “participatory culture” and the issues surrounding cultural artefacts and the tensions between top-down corporate control and bottom-up grassroots reappropriation of texts. So, are there lenses from other fields that have been useful

for developing asynchronous content that could be found useful for developers of entertainment? Is there a benefit in broadening perspectives or adapting practices when researchers step away from their own fields of expertise and explore how other fields potentially deal with similar structures, actors, actants and goals?

If any researchers are given a similar opportunity with another entertainment artefact, it would be interesting to follow the same viewers across all phases of the research, but this would be very challenging to achieve with a sizable group of viewers who would not be impacted by knowing they were being studied. Additional further study could be to observe how the amount of original content factors into the percentage of higher-level viewer activities. Does a YouTube or other Internet channel that contains a lot of content draw more viewers than those with little content? Does the number of videos on a channel influence viewer interest in that channel? Do they serve as a means of spreading their own content more quickly? There are certainly more questions to ask concerning audience cultivation and online engagement, not only in entertainment and education, but in all fields that have been impacted by digital connections and Internet technologies.

RECOMMENDATIONS

As my Literature Review demonstrates, this dissertation's framework straddles so many fields. It therefore makes sense that my recommendations should be directed to several contexts and practitioners within those contexts.

To Entertainment Content Providers

This phenomenon occurs in the broadcasting industry as well: older broadcasting professionals do not necessarily venture smoothly into cyberspace without hitting a few bumps based on assumptions that are true in traditional push media but not online. The results of this

dissertation could prove to be useful to the most experienced broadcasters who have worked for decades with the traditional broadcasting model and desire to make a move to the Internet, but do not have the budget to hire a new media or social media professional to guide them. Having come from a more hierarchical and structured business model, it will be important for these broadcasters to realize that the same qualities of the Internet which seem so freeing, can also complicate and even become the cause of problems that do not exist in traditional broadcasting. Online viewers can locate and “pull” desired media to their digital devices, can have multilateral discussions about these products with globally located friends, can give needed feedback to companies and, in general, enjoy two-way, inexpensive, direct and immediate communication which helps spread the word about products and invite the expansion of creative acts based on the initial product (or artefact). Alternatively, they can also spread the word if they do not like it—or, perhaps worse, they can say nothing at all.

The broadcast television industry operates from a very commercial model—centralized network programming budgets sustain on-air productions and promotional material, which are often supplemented through print and/or radio advertising. Although online education, in some respects, needs to be financially self-sustaining, the outcomes of education ideally and traditionally have not focused on financial objectives but, rather, on achieving student learning or changes in measurable behavior. With a difference in desired outcomes, there have been differences in operational priorities as content on the World Wide Web expanded from a small number of users when it was first deployed in 1969 to a broad public after the mid-1990s (Castells, 1996, p. xxv).

Some educational scholars ask questions regarding the social ramifications of tool availability and digital literacies (New London Group, 1996; Selfe & Selfe, 1994; Selfe, 1999).

Part of why I was interested in pursuing this case study was due to having seen the world change so radically within my lifetime and realizing that these changes were particularly hard on older people. These changes have also affected older producers of entertainment who, having spent decades under the older model, now find themselves at a technical or theoretical disadvantage, and may need some supplementary guidance. Is there a framework which feels more familiar to them that can help them cultivate and engage an online audience? Could borrowing practices from education be useful to small content providers who find it difficult to promote themselves, or to reach out to audience members? Most professionals have been students in their lifetime and have a better sense of how teachers interact with students than how broadcasters deal with their audiences.

Furthermore, since there are so many places viewers can find content online, locating new content becomes a huge issue. Once content providers understand the cyclical nature and conversational characteristics of the Internet, they can proactively design their content to allow for viewer discussion and contribution. If traditional producers do not anticipate, expect or desire a participatory audience, then that can have adverse effects on their viewership and impact their reputation. Producers will benefit from seeing how one small company such as *Explosion Bus* dealt with this issue.

Although the outcomes/objectives between the television industry and those of online education are quite different, it is possible that both industries could find commonality. Perhaps both industries could be more direct in sharing ideas and approaches that might be mutually beneficial. Associating activities of audience members to levels of engagement might provide a means of assessment that content is effective. Tracking the fluctuations in the percentages of viewers that produce more highly creative acts before and after modifications are made, and

categorizing viewers through the roles they assume could be an apt method other small content providers could benefit from. Conceptualizing *the audience as students* might offer content providers a quicker path to assessing what their “work” is online.

What I am *not* recommending is that entertainment content providers who already feel comfortable with social media and audience interaction enslave themselves to a rubric or educational framework which might restrain or stifle the relationship with their audience. Rather, my hope is that they refer to it as a guideline, which might show them where communications with their viewers could be improved.

To New Media and Communication Studies Researchers

This dissertation incorporates ideas regarding the role of individual audience members and how their unpaid, creative work can offer tangible benefits to content providers. The data of all phases of this study is available in the last four appendices of this dissertation, which might be of interest or use to other researchers.

Henry Jenkins has spent much of his career examining fan communities and how the traditional view of a passive, feminized audience changed when technologies finally allowed viewers the means to communicate not only to other fans but back to the content providers themselves. Jenkins cites how much more quickly fan communities’ culture, intelligence and size can build with the interactive affordances of the Internet. In his book *Fans, Bloggers and Gamers: Exploring Participatory Culture*² (2006), Jenkins suggests “Rather than talking about interactive technologies, we should document the interactions that occur among media consumers, between media consumers and media texts, and between media consumers and media producers” (Jenkins, 2006, p. 135). That’s precisely what my case study does and hopefully it

² Jenkins, H. (2006). *Interactive Audiences? The Collective Intelligence of Media Fans*. New York: New York University Press.

provides a structure and subject of study for other researchers interested in documenting how the role of the audience has changed and therefore the content provider-to-audience relationship.

In the Internet age, audiences are no longer confined to sitting on their couches, passively viewing content scheduled by network programmers. They are actively sharing content with other viewers, vetting and making meaning from the content, and providing feedback to the content providers. This space is described within the phenomenon Henry Jenkins refers to as convergence. Says Jenkins, “By convergence, I mean the flow of content across multiple media platforms, the cooperation between multiple media industries, and the migratory behavior of media audiences who will go almost anywhere in search of the kinds of entertainment experiences they want” (Jenkins, 2006, p. 2). “Convergence represents a cultural shift as consumers are encouraged to seek out new information and make connections among dispersed media content” (Jenkins, 2006, p. 3).

Convergence describes how technologies expand across platforms and become multi-functional. In this digital world, a phone is not just a phone anymore (Jenkins, 2006, p. 5). Television sets need to be able to receive programming from the Internet as well as from standard broadcasting channels. As Lev Manovich describes the cyclical phenomenon of “transcoding,” from technologies to society and society to technology (Manovich, 2001, p. 46), it makes sense that as fields expand, there is also a growing need for expertise that connects these fields. As McComiskey describes in the field of English studies, other fields too are expanding and melding somewhat into what had previously been separate fields. These expansions are comprised of temporary articulations, but they also shift the relationship between the content provider and the audience. Jenkins writes of the changing audiences as being active (2006, p.18), more socially-connected, migratory, noisy and public (2006, p. 19), but because of the

proliferation of media content across many platforms, they are also potentially less loyal (2006, p. 19).

Media is now everywhere, portable and expanding. Just as media brings some of us together, it also is capable of pulling us apart (Webster, 2014, p. 2). “What we are now seeing is the hardware diverging while the content converges” (Jenkins, 2006, p. 15) with fewer media giants (Jenkins, 2006, p. 18). This convergence alters the relationship between existing technologies, industries, markets, genres and audiences (2006, p. 15). Friedman (2005), Rappaport (2011), Napoli (2008, 2011, 2013), and (Shirky (2008, 2010) have all examined how the shifts in the industries shift the audiences into working together for common (articulated) social purposes as well as personal enjoyment. It would be interesting to see if the scholars who made predictions concerning new media—whether utopian or dystopian—have come true or not, and to what degree.

To English Studies Academics and Educators

I have worked with federal and corporate training professionals as well as university professors in converting face-to-face teaching materials to online educational media and, typically, their field of expertise does not include an understanding of new media practices. Although professors and trainers may have had considerable experience in traditional classroom teaching and know a lot about their respective fields, some mistakenly assume that they can teach just as well online without learning the ways in which the Internet’s affordances, quirks and challenges differ from teaching face-to-face. Other instructors may understand these differences, but find these differences conceptually unnerving. As I have worked alongside instructional professionals, I have seen that most of them received their Ph.D.s or training long before Internet technologies and practices had ever been developed into the efficient educational

vehicle they have become. A significant number of these professors had no experience as online students themselves, sometimes never having taken a single online course.

As we draw closer to the third decade of the 21st century, there is no doubt a higher percentage of professors who have either taken courses online or who have already been introduced to online teaching. However, that does not necessarily mean they have taken graduate level courses in online pedagogy. It is my recommendation that educators be proactive in seeking out the latest information on best practices in the field of online learning, especially if the institution has not been proactive in providing templates or rubrics to guide them.

Finally, for academics in general, I wish to point out one of the most unique aspects of this dissertation is that I, as a single e-learning developer, found a way to partner with an entertainment content provider. As mentioned before, there has been much research regarding educators being brought in to inform the pedagogical strategies for an educational television project, often at an institutional level, but typically not for a single producer nor for an entertainment context. This occurred because, while I was nearing the end of my coursework for this degree, I was looking for a potential dissertation topic that was not only of interest to me, but one that could be useful to a real-world situation. As my degree was on the new media and professional writing track under the English umbrella, I felt a great amount of freedom to start my search for a potential topic with my own personal interests. I invite other academics to do the same. Look for ways to partner with members of other fields. Think out of the box. I invite academics to find ways to somehow apply their field expertise to other fields, starting with their personal interests. A new project could emerge from a simple conversation that starts with questions such as, “Are you finding that you’re having difficulties accomplishing your goals?” or “Do you want some assistance?” That is how this dissertation came about.

To Cultural Studies Researchers and Last Thoughts

When Bourdieu describes the *Struggle for the Dominant Principle of Hierarchization* (1993, p. 40), and how “permeable” the boundaries are around each field, I am reminded of how the Internet has impacted and, in many instances, disrupted older forms of industry practices and public behaviors. Thanks to technological developments, online services such as Uber, Airbnb, and Khan Academy have made their way through the porous boundaries of taxi services, hotels, and education, and through innovation have seriously challenged the dominant status quo.

In the case of newer industries such as television and Internet-based entertainment, Bourdieu’s conceptualization of fields within fields can be applied. As the fields of art and literature have their idiosyncrasies, so does the field of traditional television, which has been disrupted by the proliferation of new media technologies, services and content providers, which, in turn, has caused changes within audience and fan practices. Bourdieu may have been writing before this great expansion of content, but his framework allows for this expansion.

Intermediaries are still moving in-between the producer and the consumer, and this widening of content widens gaps in the boundaries surrounding the entertainment industry. (Cooke, 2016b, p. 14)

Bruce McComiskey’s discussion of expansions within the field of English studies leads to the rise of specializations and the “argument for the value—the right to equal status—of each individual discipline among all the English studies disciplines, yet it is also an argument for disciplinary integration” (McComiskey, 2006, p. 51). However, are any of these subfields seeking out opportunities to talk to each other and share findings, practices and perspectives across contexts? As any biological life grows, the cells within a body expand, split, separate and specialize, and yet are joined by connective tissues which help hold individual cells in place so

the body as a whole can work together. As cells become more specialized, more connective tissues need to position themselves in-between. Something needs to articulate within the “And.. and.. and” rhizomatic state that Deleuze and Guattari described in a connected society (Deleuze & Guattari, 1987, p. 25). Bourdieu says, “every new position... leads to all sorts of changes in the position-takings of the occupants of the other positions” (Bourdieu, 1993, p. 58). Bourdieu, along with James Curran (2000) and Keith Negus (2002), have discussed third-party, cultural intermediaries who are neither the creator of content nor the consumer of it, who can potentially widen the space between both. What about intermediaries who place themselves between fields, but who are firmly rooted in both? Is there a space for “connective tissue” or, rather, third-party cultural intermediaries which can provide improved communication and greater agility between fields in an ever-evolving converging and rhizomatic society?

Looking at job opportunities on employment websites such as LinkedIn, Monster, Indeed and CareerBuilder, the job market at large is filled with classified ads demanding more diverse skill sets, while academia is training practitioners firmly rooted in specializations. As human knowledge and technologies grow, spaces between the fields could benefit from connective entities that articulate, transfer and translate information across specializations, across fields and possibly borrow conclusions made in other fields for other contexts. Connective media needs connective intermediaries and that is what my role was in this case study.

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APPENDIX A

THREE VERSIONS OF THE *EXPLOSION BUS* WEBSITE

SEPTEMBER 2011



MARCH 2012

Home | Explosion Bus: The World's Last Hope - Mozilla Firefox

http://www.explosionbus.com/

EXPLOSION BUS

from the creators of "Dr. Katz"

Share Like (640)

A WEB SERIES ABOUT TWO PATHETIC MEN TAKING ON AMERICA'S MOST POPULAR TALENT SHOW!

New Episode Every Tuesday!

Episode 3

EPISODES
EXTRAS
REVIEWS (by Tony)
STORE
ABOUT

Explosion Bus: Episode 3

*new stuff

Find: hank

Transferring data from li.yimg.com...

McAfee Internet Sec... Home | Explosion B... Spider Software

Yahoo! Search

9:45 PM

SEPTEMBER 2012

EXPLOSION BUS

THE WEB SERIES
from the creators of "Dr. Katz"

[about](#)
NEW [blog](#)
NEW [episodes](#)
[extras](#)
[store](#)

Like (1.1k)
Send

SEASON 1

EP. 12 "THE JOKE-OFF"

Who's the best comedian on the bus? In the EB series finale, Jon, Leo, Matt D. and Tanya face off in a controversial "Joke-Off." (Plus! A short message from Tom Snyder during the credits.)

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 11 12

GET THE DVD

The Origin Story

Animated Shorts

FOLLOW US:

- [Facebook](#)
- [Twitter](#)
- [EB Blog](#)

LOOK AROUND:

- [About](#)
- [Episodes](#)
- [Extras](#)
- [Shop](#)

GET INVOLVED:

- [audition for explosion bus](#)
- [view auditions](#)
- [discover more content](#)
- [contact](#)

©2012
Explosion
Bus

APPENDIX B

EXPLOSION BUS WEBSITE & AN ADAPTED RUBRIC

ExplosionBus.com with an Adapted Review Process.

	<i>Explosion Bus Issues</i>	My Suggestion
Overview, Introduction & Navigation	<p>A.1 Although the current episode initially was prominently featured on the EB website, earlier episodes were not, which might pose a problem to the new viewer.</p> <p>A.2 The original plan was that the story would be told in flashback from a congressional hearing set in 2016 and that the date the episode was posted would be the same date within the story. This really seems an unnecessary facet of the story since once episodes are posted, they stay online (and are still available today). Only someone who watched the episode the first day may notice this, and if they don't, nothing is lost in the story.</p> <p>A.3 If the viewer is expected to do anything (subscribe, share, create audition tapes, vote), it wasn't clear.</p> <p>A.4 Only mentions "From the Creators of Dr. Katz."</p> <p>A.5 Not necessary, although if the viewer has seen one of the other Snyder/Katz series, it might help create recognition and expectation.</p>	<p>A.1 On EB web page, show new viewers where to start.</p> <p>A.2 Mention when the next episode would be launched.</p> <p>A.3 Describe if the viewer is expected to do anything (subscribe, share, create audition tapes, vote), either within the EB episode credits or in a separate video.</p> <p>A.4 Tie EB to more past brands (Science Court, Squigglevision, X and Laura, Tom Snyder Productionsetc).</p> <p>A.5 Not necessary, although if the viewer has seen one of the other Snyder/Katz series, it might help create recognition and expectation.</p>
Objectives/Expectations	<p>B.1. Although it is clear that EB is an animated comedy show, if the viewer is expected to do anything (subscribe, share, create audition tapes, vote), it could be clearer.</p> <p>B.2, although the course-level is not applicable, measurable outcomes should be described.</p>	<p>B.1/B.2 Describe if the viewer is expected to do anything (subscribe, share, create audition tapes, vote), either within the EB episode credits or in a separate video.</p>
Assessment	<p>C.1. Viewers need to be told that EB creators want them to subscribe, share, participate in chats, order items off the EB STORE, send links to audition videos, and vote for the best ones. They need to be told what to expect when they audition.</p> <p>C.2. Criteria for audition videos (length, say "This is my audition for <i>Explosion Bus</i>," and instructions on how to send EB links to audition videos, etc.</p>	<p>C.1 Remind viewers to subscribe, etc. in the credits.</p> <p>C.1. Create an instruction video on how to create video auditions for EB.</p>

Resources

D.1. There aren't any instructions.

Engagement

E.1 Whereas, *Explosion Bus* doesn't really offer "learning activities, the creators do need viewers to show active levels of engagement to show they are enjoying the series.

E.2 Creating videos and voting on others' videos offers a two-way interaction with EB content, offers viewers a way to interact with the content as a co-producer and gives viewer-to-viewer interaction not typically possible in traditional "push" broadcasting. They need to subscribe, share, engage, share EB links, blog about the show, create audition videos, vote on other audition videos, to get the word out about *Explosion Bus* and get more people to watch. Viewers are assumed to know how to engage in each of these activities, if they so choose.

E.4 Viewers need to know format and content criteria for audition videos.

Technology

F.1 The audition videos asked of the viewers fits peripherally in with the narrative of the show, although these will not be specifically mentioned as impacting the series' narrative or plot.

F.2 (I think some viewers were afraid their videos were going to be ridiculed.)

F.3 New viewers need to find old episodes in the order they were meant to be watched, but be allowed to watch them in any order they choose.

D.1. EB needs to make instructions on how viewers should create audition videos.

Make the audition video procedure simple enough so as to encourage more participation.

Viewers need to be able to find instructions on further expectations from EB.

E.1 Take advantage of the 2-way interactivity of the Internet, not possible in "push" media contexts, by giving the viewers something to do—a way to participate—by creating their own audition videos and submitting them for all to see. Then during the week before the next show airs, have other viewers vote on which was the best video of the week. The winner will be featured at the beginning of the next *Explosion Bus* episode.

E.2. See if there are increases in higher-level creative acts to gauge viewer interest and engagement.

Make sure participants follow criteria for viewer-generated content.

E.4 It was apt not to require activities, but it was requested to spread the word.

F.1 Viewers might have been more engaged if their videos were specifically referenced in the series by the stars.

F.2 There should have been some way to assure viewers their videos would not be ridiculed (none were, but people still might have been skittish).

F.3 Tell/show viewers in what order the episodes are to be watched, but give viewers the option to watch a la carte.

APPENDIX C

OVERALL ENGAGEMENT RESULTS TABLE

Overall Engagement Results Across All Phases.

Activities	Phase 0	Phase 1	Phase 2	Phase 3	Phase 4 ¹
EB page visitors	217 ²	10,756 ³	5,479 ⁴	_* ⁵	_* ⁶
EB pg views	11,496	33,880	21,703	_*	_*
# of EB YT Videos	13 shorts	7 episodes +19 shorts 6 auditions = 32	21 episodes +45 auditions +8 instruct /promos +7 Teachers + 8 Snyder vid = 89	20 episodes +1 promo + 3 Instruct +4 <i>Average Americans</i> +7 auditions =35	14 episodes +4 podcasts +1 short +1 Snyder vid +1 EB 2-hr audio = 21
YT Views /clicks	892 (no episodes)	7494 (5696 episodes) ⁷	18019 (4772 episodes)	51042 (45453 episodes)	10654 all (9800 episodes)
Videos w/ zero comments	4 promos +4 cast	6 clips + 4 cast	3 Snyder +3 instruct.	1 (web audition)	4 (all 3 rd party podcasts)

¹ Phase Four Data is based on 30 March 2014.

² Phase 0 Google Analytics, from 1 July-11 Sept 2011. Google Analytics also shows an average session duration of 12:51 minutes, and a bounce rate of 27.78%.

³ Phase 1 Google Analytics, from 12 Sept-11 March 2012. Google Analytics also shows an average session duration of 2:29 minutes, and a bounce rate of 58.75%.

⁴ Phase 2 Google Analytics, from 12 March 2012-17 Sept 2012. Google Analytics also shows an average session duration of 2:30 minutes, and a bounce rate of 61.16%.

⁵ This gap of ExplosionBus.com data stems from a change in web masters and servers, from 20 Sept 2012 to 20 Jan 2013 (between the original postings on the old site and the relaunch of the new site). The data for 18 and 19 Sept show 13 visitors, 25 page views, an average session duration of 4:51 min and a bounce rate of 46.15%. In spite of the lack of data, these numbers do show a decrease in visitors as time went on. The number of distinct visits was 24 and 381 in the first two phases and 4,732 in the last three months of Phase Three.

This data also shows that most of the visit durations to the ExplosionBus.com web page were very brief. Through 30 Sept 2012, 16,494 visits lasted 10 seconds or less. Of the 25, 381 total visitors, 1471 visitors remained on the website for 10 minutes or more (530, for over a half-hour). During the last part of Phase Three when all the episodes were shorter (January 2012 – March 2013), the analytics show 4732 visits, with 197 of those visits lasting 10 minutes or longer (21 over a half-hour).

⁶ *Explosion Bus* page analytics are not included from Phase 4 as the data gap continued through the rest of this phase. The data was later tracked by talentexplosion.com following the end of Phase 4 (30 March 2012) and it shows only one visitor during this time. It was after Phase 4 that I was collecting information about the website design, and no doubt my visits have increased and skewed the overall numbers. In spite of the lack of data, the numbers across each of the phases do show a decrease in visitors as time went on.

⁷ Episodes-5695, web auds-666, EB clips+ TS lectures, etc-1133= 7494.

	auditions = 8	auditions +3 web auditions = 13	+22 web auditions = 28		
<50% ep viewed	46.15%	*	.09523%	60%	0%
>50% ep viewed	53.84%	*	90.4761%	40%	100%
Ave % of episode viewed	47.63692	*	69.628	51.179	63.35
Shared	2	8	(13 episodes only) 459 all	(35 thru episodes) 51	85
Anattn.Clicks	-	-	_* ⁸	- ⁹	959
Disliked	-	9	1 episodes only (17)	(12 from ph 3) 20	All 5 from episodes
Liked	10	68	(103 episodes only) 430	(523 from episodes) 668	251 (233 from episodes)
Subscribed	1	44	(68 episodes only) 201 all	(276 from episodes) 286	All 24 from episodes
Comments¹⁰	3	25 ¹¹	(73 episodes only) 202	(171 from episodes) 247	90 (75 from episodes)
<5 wd. Neg	-	0	1	-	-
>5 wd. Neg	-	0	5	6	3
-Constructive	-	-	-	4	3
-Troll	-	-	1	1	-
<5 wd. Neut	-	1	12	16	3
>5 wd. Neut	-	10	21	26	7
-Joke	-	1	2	2	-
-Query	-	3	1+3	1+8	2
-Understand	-	4	4	2+5	-
<5 wd. Pos	-	2	42	64	5
>5 wd. Pos	3	4	90	125	40
IntensPos	2	3	6+17	13+31	10 (plot ideas)
EB/Team	1	8	73	76	41
Comments					
Audition	-	5	45	7	-
Spin-off	-	-	1	3 series	2
			(19 episodes)	(11+43+9)	Both posted 1

⁸ Data are not available in analytics.

⁹ Data are not available in analytics.

¹⁰ Comments= total number of individual comments. These do NOT include comments by EB team members. Comments which depict higher levels of interest are included in the total number of comments, but also counted separately.

¹¹ Comment data come from the extra clips. Comments from the episodes had been disabled.

				= 63 episodes)	episode each
Recap	-	-	-	1	-
				(18 episodes)	
Extra series	-	-	-	-	1

APPENDIX D

ANALYTIC/QUANTITATIVE DATA FOR PHASE TWO

Viewing Habits for Phase Two.

EB Titles	Video Length (min)	Ave % of video Viewed¹	Views	Minutes watched
EB Origin Story #1	6.02	53.74	3015	543
Tom Snyder's Advanced Writing : Flashbacks (Part. 1)	3.90	49.17	165	316
<i>Explosion Bus</i> : Send Us Your Audition!	0.22	56.25	165	20
Web Audition, Alysen	2.38	66.87	42	67
Web Audition: Rob's Dancing Gnomes	1.47	40.87	19	11
<i>Explosion Bus</i> : Product Reviews	1.18	60.7	13	9
Web Audition: Michael E. (part 3)	2.25	35.33	9	7
EB Origin Story #2	5.78	66.8	1151	4446
Tom Snyder's Advanced Writing : Flashbacks (Part. 2)	3.97	52.96	47	99
Web Audition: Ryan, Spooky Storyteller	2.90	50.84	25	37
Web Audition: Zack, Musician	3.40	32.48	9	10
Web Audition: Zack, Musician (pt. 2)	3.25	18.99	8	5
EB Origin Story #3	5.82	70.39	746	3055
Tom Snyder's Advanced Writing: Foreshadowing (Part 1)	2.67	58.71	45	70
Web Audition: Dane, Thinker	2.33	64.38	15	23
Web Audition: The Bazile Sisters, Music	0.98	47.08	13	6
EB Origin Story #4	5.27	71.49	628	2365
Web Audition: Buckley,	0.95	63.1	196	117

¹ Viewing totals are as of 16 Sept 2012.

Cartoon				
Tom Snyder's Advanced Writing: Foreshadowing (Part 2)	2.32	44.72	86	89
Web Audition: Joe, Musician	2.67	24.79	11	7
EB Origin Story #5	4.77	62.86	666	1996
Web Audition: Matt, Musician	3.45	29.08	20	20
Web Audition: Bryan, Bicyclist	1.37	57.72	8	6
Tom Snyder's Advanced Writing: Irony (Part 1)	3.90	51.46	163	327
EB Origin Story #6	5.05	70.8	523	1870
Tom Snyder's Advanced Writing: Irony (Part 2)	3.57	48.61	55	95
Web Audition: Lyndy, Rapper	2.08	42.58	23	20
Web Audition: Skyler, Rapper	2.18	18.75	11	5
Web Audition: Mitt Santorum Hossain, Rapper	0.78	37.56	4	1
EB Origin Story #7	5.33	70.08	494	1846
Web Audition: Rich, Accordion	2.85	48.87	57	79
Tom Snyder's Advanced Writing: Irony (Part 3)	3.20	59.31	37	70
Web Audition: Shakespeare Puppets	2.82	33.62	31	29
Web Audition: Feral, Rap	1.38	21.32	5	1
Jonathan Katz performs on "Jon Benjamin has a Tour"	8.42	41.83	992	3492
EB Origin Story #8	5.57	72.8	453	1836
Teachers Lounge: "Parent Conferences"	1.97	52.53	405	418
Teachers Lounge: "Rubrics"	1.98	62.09	268	330
Teachers Lounge: "Student Teachers"	2.82	46.25	199	259
Teachers Lounge: "Discipline"	1.48	54.64	310	251
Teachers Lounge: "Tests"	1.75	61.68	232	250
Teachers Lounge: "Preparation"	1.13	62.48	90	64

Web Audition: Anthony, Magic	2.25	60.97	35	48
Web Audition: Phil, Autonomous Left Hand	1.70	36.22	23	14
Teachers Lounge: "Task Force"	2.37	58	82	113
EB Origin Story #9	7.23	69.62	473	2388
Web Audition: Brandon, Musician	4.03	37.79	19	29
Web Audition: Jeremy, Musician	1.65	53.63	8	7
EB Origin Story #10	7.63	66.44	442	2242
Web Audition: Steve, Musician	4.02	27.45	8	9
Web Audition: Stanley, Poetry	1.73	57.88	6	6
EB Origin Story #11	6.98	66.26	421	1948
Inappropriate Professor/Student Relationships	3.48	46.06	126	202
Web Audition: Andy, Musician	3.88	29.94	16	19
Web Audition: "The Originals," Lip Sync	3.80	24.63	3	3
EB Origin Story #12	6.85	69.76	390	1864
Web Audition: John Wing, Comedy & Poetry	3.65	50.16	84	154
Web Audition: Graymalkin, Poetry & Puppetry	3.28	26.61	20	17
EB Origin Story #13	7.88	70.37	374	2075
Web Audition: Kelsie, Singer	2.23	32.23	29	21
Web Audition: Charles, Violin Improvisation	4.62	22.47	18	19
EB Origin Story #14	5.57	70.06	372	1451
Web Audition: Feral, Rap with Adorable Dancer	1.60	43.97	21	15
Web Audition: Matt, Raconteur	2.77	47.65	7	9
EB Origin Story #15	7.45	68.01	365	1849
Web Audition: Rabbit Troop Forever, Band	3.78	20.76	54	42
Web Audition: Gary, Impressionist	1.03	57.35	37	22
EB Origin Story #16	8.60	67.37	346	2005

Web Audition: Connie & Karen, Dance	1.60	54.6	24	21
EB Origin Story #17	7.88	66.68	326	1714
Web Audition: Michael, 3D Video Game	2.20	37.5	32	26
Web Audition: "SoSoon," Rap	2.22	36.8	16	13
EB Origin Story #18	7.00	63.59	352	1567
Web Audition: Ethan, Stealth	1.68	55.07	32	30
Web Audition: Pepper, Patience	1.22	64.85	20	16
EB Origin Story #19	8.57	64.24	329	1811
Web Audition: Amir, Stand Up	3.62	28.24	202	206
Web Audition: Andrew, Soccer Juggling	1.48	37.32	18	10
EB Origin Story #20	10.00	64.4	379	2441
Web Audition: Tiel, Comedy Impressions	2.53	41.2	37	39
Web Audition: Lawrence, Monologue	1.55	42.47	43	28
Web Audition: Charlie, Impressions	1.53	42.03	37	24
Web Audition: Mommy, Writing	2.12	22.18	37	17
EB Origin Story #21	9.12	64.15	371	2170
<i>"One Night Stand"</i>	7.70	44.75	264	910
A NEW Look! (Part 1)	4.10	32.81	34	46
Tom Snyder makes his Announcement	1.13	68.72	99	77
Jonathan Katz has an Announcement!	1.08	68.23	69	51
A NEW Look! (Part 2)	4.82	32.64	65	102

Analytic Data for All Phase Two Videos.

No.	EB channel videos Phase Two (date posted)	Views	Likes	Dislikes	Shares	Subscribers	Comments
1.	EB Origin Story #1	3015	17	-	4	30	12
2.	Tom Snyder's Advanced Writing : Flashbacks (Part. 1)	165	2	-	-	1	-
3.	<i>Explosion Bus</i> : Send Us Your Audition!	165	-	-	-	1	-
4.	Web Audition, Alysen	42	1	-	-	-	-
5.	Web Audition: Rob's Dancing Gnomes	19	1	-	-	-	-
6.	<i>Explosion Bus</i> : Product Reviews	13	-	-	-	-	-
7.	Web Audition: Michael E. (part 3)	9	-	-	-	-	-
8.	EB Origin Story #2	1151	10	-	-	13	1
9.	Tom Snyder's Advanced Writing : Flashbacks (Part. 2)	47	-	-	-	-	-
10.	Web Audition: Ryan, Spooky Storyteller	25	1	-	-	1	-
11.	Web Audition: Zack, Musician	9	-	-	-	-	-
12.	Web Audition: Zack, Musician (pt. 2)	8	-	-	-	-	-
13.	EB Origin Story #3	746	9	-	-	2	-
14.	Tom Snyder's Advanced Writing: Foreshadowing (Part 1)	45	-	-	-	-	-
15.	Web Audition: Dane, Thinker	15	-	-	-	-	-
16.	Web Audition: The Bazile Sisters, Music	13	-	-	-	-	-
17.	EB Origin Story #4	628	4	-	-	6	3
18.	Web Audition: Buckley, Cartoon	196	2	-	-	-	1
19.	Tom Snyder's Advanced Writing: Foreshadowing (Part 2)	86	-	-	-	-	1
20.	Web Audition: Joe, Musician	11	-	-	-	-	-

21.	EB Origin Story #5	666	11	1	-	8	-
22.	Web Audition: Matt, Musician	20	-	-	-	-	-
23.	Web Audition: Bryan, Bicyclist	8	-	-	-	1	-
24.	Tom Snyder's Advanced Writing: Irony (Part 1)	163	2	-	-	-	-
25.	EB Origin Story #6	523	2	-	-	1	-
26.	Tom Snyder's Advanced Writing: Irony (Part 2)	55	-	-	-	-	-
27.	Web Audition: Lyndy, Rapper	23	-	-	-	-	-
28.	Web Audition: Skyler, Rapper	11	-	-	-	-	-
29.	Web Audition: Mitt Santorum Hossain, Rapper	4	-	-	-	-	-
30.	EB Origin Story #7	494	4	-	-	3	1
31.	Web Audition: Rich, Accordion	57	3	-	-	-	-
32.	Tom Snyder's Advanced Writing: Irony (Part 3)	37	-	-	-	-	-
33.	Web Audition: Shakespeare Puppets	31	-	-	-	-	-
34.	Web Audition: Feral, Rap	5	-	-	-	-	-
35.	Jonathan Katz performs on "Jon Benjamin has a Tour"	992	7	-	1	2	-
36.	EB Origin Story #8	453	3	-	-	-	-
37.	Teachers Lounge: "Parent Conferences"	405	1	-	-	-	-
38.	Teachers Lounge: "Rubrics"	268	1	-	-	-1	-
39.	Teachers Lounge: "Student Teachers"	199	1	-	-	-	-
40.	Teachers Lounge: "Discipline"	310	-	-	-	-	-
41.	Teachers Lounge: "Tests"	232	-	-	-	2	-
42.	Teachers Lounge: "Preparation"	90	1	-	-	-	-
43.	Web Audition:	35	-	1	-	-	-

44.	Anthony, Magic Web Audition: Phil, Autonomous Left Hand	23	-	-	-	-	-
45.	Teachers Lounge: "Task Force"	82	1	-	1	-	-
46.	EB Origin Story #9	473	5	-	-	-	1
47.	Web Audition: Brandon, Musician	19	-	-	-	-	-
48.	Web Audition: Jeremy, Musician	8	1	-	-	-	-
49.	EB Origin Story #10	442	7	-	-	1	-
50.	Web Audition: Steve, Musician	8	-	-	-	-	-
51.	Web Audition: Stanley, Poetry	6	-	-	-	-	-
52.	EB Origin Story #11	421	7	-	-	2	4
53.	Inappropriate Professor/Student Relationships	126	-1	-	-	-	-
54.	Web Audition: Andy, Musician	16	1	-	-	-	-
55.	Web Audition: "The Originals," Lip Sync	3	0	-	-	-	-
56.	EB Origin Story #12	390	4	-	-	-	-
57.	Web Audition: John Wing, Comedy & Poetry	84	2	-	-	-	1
58.	Web Audition: Graymalkin, Poetry & Puppetry	20	-	-	-	-	-
59.	EB Origin Story #13	374	2	-	-	-	2
60.	Web Audition: Kelsie, Singer	29	1	-	-	-	-
61.	Web Audition: Charles, Violin Improvisation	18	-	-	-	-	-
62.	EB Origin Story #14	372	-	-	-	-	-
63.	Web Audition: Feral, Rap with Adorable Dancer	21	-	-	-	-	-
64.	Web Audition: Matt, Raconteur	7	-	-	-	-	-
65.	EB Origin Story #15	365	3	-	-	3	-
66.	Web Audition: Rabbit Troop Forever, Band	54	1	-	-	-	2
67.	Web Audition: Gary,	37	2	-	-	-	-

	Impressionist						
68.	EB Origin Story #16	346	2	-	-	1	-
69.	Web Audition: Connie & Karen, Dance	24	1	-	-	-	-
70.	EB Origin Story #17	326	1	-	-	-	1
71.	Web Audition: Michael, 3D Video Game	32	-	1	-	-	-
72.	Web Audition: "SoSoon," Rap	16	-	-	-	-	-
73.	EB Origin Story #18	352	3	-	-	1	-
74.	Web Audition: Ethan, Stealth	32	2	-	-	-	-
75.	Web Audition: Pepper, Patience	20	-	-	-	-	-
76.	EB Origin Story #19	329	3	-	-	-	-
77.	Web Audition: Amir, Stand Up	202	1	-	2	-	-
78.	Web Audition: Andrew, Soccer Juggling	18	-	-	-	-	-
79.	EB Origin Story #20	379	2	-	-	-	-
80.	Web Audition: Tiel, Comedy Impressions	37	-	-	-	-	-
81.	Web Audition: Lawrence, Monologue	43	-	-	-	-	-
82.	Web Audition: Charlie, Impressions	37	-	-	-	-	-
83.	Web Audition: Mommy, Writing	37	-	-	-	1	-
84.	EB Origin Story #21	371	4	-	-	-	-
85.	"One Night Stand"	264	8	-	2	2	7
86.	A NEW Look! (Part 1)	34	2	-	-	-	-
87.	Tom Snyder makes his Announcement	99	-	-	-	-	-
88.	Jonathan Katz has an Announcement!	69	-	-	-	1	1
89.	A NEW Look! (Part 2)	65	-	-	-	-	-

APPENDIX E

ANALYTIC/QUANTITATIVE DATA FOR PHASE THREE

Overall Viewing Habits for Phase Three.

EB Phase Three Titles	Video Length (min)	Ave % of video viewed¹	Views	Minutes watched
EB Origin Story #22	6.43	46.81	947	2852
Audition for <i>Explosion Bus!</i>	1.67	56.99	643	611
A New Look! (Part 3)	6.13	26.32	90	145
EB Origin Story #23	6.22	51.51	1278	4093
Web Audition: Uncle Nard!	1.43	42.84	106	65
EB Origin Story #24	6.28	46.74	1283	3768
Web Audition: Faulke Yue	3.27	30.9	184	186
EB Origin Story #25	6.63	45.89	1072	3272
Web Audition: Charlie, Arts & Crafts	1.33	56.14	329	245
EB Origin Story #26	6.52	42.89	1173	3259
EB Origin Story #27	6.53	50.8	1545	5128
EB Origin Story #28 " <i>Strip Club</i> "	4.72	55.76	1870	4918
Web Audition: Shoney, Face Music	1.07	58.39	136	83
EB Origin Story #29	6.20	51.33	1054	3351
Ep. 1 " <i>One Night Stand</i> "	6.55	57.23	9221	34563
Ep. 2 " <i>Prom</i> "	6.35	59.01	4226	15833
Ep. 3 "The Nigerian Prince"	5.93	55.49	3130	10306
Ep. 4 "Period"	6.22	54.39	2637	8916
Ep. 5 "Comedy Writers"	6.48	46.44	2998	9017
<i>Explosion Bus</i> - The Trailer	1.05	65.97	1086	747
Ep. 6 "Las Vegas"	6.23	44.47	3017	8363
Web Audition: Mr. Bighead	2.10	35.79	163	123
Ep. 7 "Gun Control"	6.48	52.95	1528	5246
Web Audition: Michael, Rap	1.07	57.81	114	70
Ep. 8 "Smokin' Hot"	6.27	53.38	1661	5556
Ep. 9 "Ping-Pong"	6.45	55.18	2026	7211
Web Audition: Siobhan, 24 Skills	2.68	58.28	168	263
Ep. 10 "Yoga"	6.38	49.28	3388	10657
Average Americans: Climate Change	3.92	55.05	682	1470
Average Americans: Valentine's Day	3.82	53.37	620	1263
Average Americans: The Academy Awards	3.52	56.94	431	863
Cartoon Harlem Shake	0.52	92.75	368	176
Ep. 11 "Daryl Hall & the Talent Scouts"	7.70	48.75	946	3551

¹ Totals are as of 16 Sept 2012.

Average Americans: Sequestration	3.87	56.68	469	1028
Ep. 12 "The Joke-Off"	8.27	55.28	453	2070

Analytic Data for All Phase Three Videos.

No.	Original episodes (date posted)	Views	Likes	Dislikes	Shares	Subscribers	Comments
1.	EB Origin Story #22	947	14	-	1	7	16
2.	Audition for <i>Explosion Bus!</i>	643	7	-	1	-	1
3.	A New Look! (Part 3)	90	2	-	-	-	5
4.	EB Origin Story #23	1278	17	-	-	3	12
5.	Web Audition: Uncle Nard!	106	7	1	1	-	4
6.	EB Origin Story #24	1283	7	-	-	2	12
7.	Web Audition: Faulke Yue	184	8	-	3	1	5
8.	EB Origin Story #25	1072	12	-	-	1	11
9.	Web Audition: Charlie, Arts & Crafts	329	33	1	3	2	6
10.	EB Origin Story #26	1173	12	-	1	6	1
11.	EB Origin Story #27	1545	15	-	2	8	6
12.	EB Origin Story #28 "Strip Club"	1870	18	1	1	8	7
13.	Web Audition: Shoney, Face Music	136	4	1	-	1	1
14.	EB Origin Story #29	1054	16	2	2	5	4
15.	Ep. 1 "One Night Stand"	9221	78	6	8	127	10
16.	Ep. 2 "Prom"	4226	51	-	1	36	8
17.	Ep. 3 "The Nigerian Prince"	3130	43	1	3	21	7
18.	Ep. 4 "Period"	2637	36	-	-	4	5
19.	Ep. 5 "Comedy Writers"	2998	39	-	3	7	9
20.	<i>Explosion Bus</i> - The Trailer	1086	5	-	-	2	3
21.	Ep. 6 "Las Vegas"	3017	26	1	1	9	6
22.	Web Audition: Mr. Bighead	163	1	-	-	1	-
23.	Ep. 7 "Gun Control"	1528	18	-	2	9	4
24.	Web Audition: Michael, Rap	114	4	2	-	-	3
25.	Ep. 8 "Smokin' Hot"	1661	31	-	-	12	20
26.	Ep. 9 "Ping-Pong"	2026	24	-	2	1	4
27.	Web Audition: Siobhan, 24 Skills	168	5	-	-	-1	2
28.	Ep. 10 "Yoga"	3388	27	1	1	2	9
29.	Average Americans: Climate Change	682	19	1	3	4	6
30.	Average Americans: Valentine's Day	620	10	-	3	-	8

31.	Average Americans: The Academy Awards	431	12	-	1	-	15
32.	Cartoon Harlem Shake	368	14	1	-	-	12
33.	Ep. 11 "Daryl Hall & the Talent Scouts"	946	26	-	5	6	11
34.	Average Americans: Sequestration	469	14	1	1	-	5
35.	Ep. 12 "The Joke-Off"	453	13	-	2	2	9

APPENDIX F

ANALYTIC/QUANTITATIVE DATA FOR PHASE FOUR

Viewing Habits for Phase Four.

EB Phase Four Titles	Video Length (min)	Ave % of video viewed¹	Views	Minutes watched
Sketchy Recording with Tom	2.32	83.99	10	19
Podcaster Fred	3.03	56.88	123	212
The EB Origin Story (audio)	159.48	7.66	180	2200
"You Made it Weird" with Tom Snyder & Jonathan Katz	131.30	9.72	273	3485
"Sklarbro Country" with Tom Snyder & Jonathan Katz	73.17	17.68	139	1798
"Fitz Dog Radio" with Tom Snyder & Jonathan Katz	48.27	23.01	75	833
"Jordan, Jesse, Go!" with Tom Snyder & Jonathan Katz	90.15	11.39	54	555
<i>Homo Erectus</i> Show: "I don't watch TV"	1.57	52.88	2467	2044
<i>Homo Erectus</i> Show: "Whispers at parties"	1.40	61.23	1258	1078
<i>Homo Erectus</i> Show: "Self-Laughter"	1.50	63.67	1099	1050
<i>Homo Erectus</i> Show: "We don't say that anymore"	1.55	63.93	1057	1047
Emergency Broadcast test v1	0.50	81.17	15	6
<i>Homo Erectus</i> Show: "Mr. Fake Nice guy"	1.83	60.35	1047	1158
<i>Homo Erectus</i> Show: "States the Obvious"	1.53	74.14	209	238
<i>Homo Erectus</i> Show: "Buyer's Remorse"	1.47	61.03	482	431

¹ Totals are as of 16 Sept 2012.

<i>Homo Erectus</i> Show: "Bad Translator"	1.65	61.09	423	426
<i>Homo Erectus</i> Show: "Exaggerates Everything"	1.60	57.21	296	271
<i>Homo Erectus</i> Show: "Minces Words"	1.58	67.74	353	379
<i>Homo Erectus</i> Show: "WE"	1.42	65.89	449	419
<i>Homo Erectus</i> Show: "The Weak Male"	1.72	71.1	320	391
<i>Homo Erectus</i> Show: "My-Political-Insight-Is- Better-Sourced-Than- Yoursicus"	1.53	66.4	266	271
<i>Homo Erectus</i> Show: "Homo-Steals-the- Spotlight"	1.63	60.22	74	73

 Analytic Data for All Phase Four Videos.

No.	EB channel episodes Phase Four (date posted)	Views	Likes	Dislikes	Shares	Subscribers	Comments
1.	<i>Homo Erectus</i> Show: "I don't watch TV"	181	36	2	4	14	8
2.	<i>Homo Erectus</i> Show: "Whispers at parties"	481	21	1	-	4	4
3.	<i>Homo Erectus</i> Show: "Self-Laughter"	442	18	-	1	6	2
4.	<i>Homo Erectus</i> Show: "We don't say that anymore"	292	28	-	1	2	6
5.	<i>Homo Erectus</i> Show: "Mr. Fake Nice guy"	365	20	1	3	4	11
6.	<i>Homo Erectus</i> Show: "States the Obvious"	17	14	-	-	1	1
7.	<i>Homo Erectus</i> Show: "Buyer's Remorse"	644	19	1	-	-	10
8.	<i>Homo Erectus</i> Show: "Bad Translator"	96	15	-	-	1	7
9.	<i>Homo Erectus</i> Show: "Exaggerates Everything"	44	18	-	1	-	8
10.	<i>Homo Erectus</i> Show: "Minces Words"	27	12	-	1	1	1
11.	<i>Homo Erectus</i> Show: "WE"	33	17	-	-	3	5
12.	<i>Homo Erectus</i> Show: "The Weak Male"	10	12	2	-	-1	3
13.	<i>Homo Erectus</i> Show: "My-Political-Insight-Is-Better-Sourced-Than-Yoursicus"	98	15	-	-	1	5
14.	<i>Homo Erectus</i> Show: "Homo-Steals-the-Spotlight"	994	17	2	-	-	5

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Doctorate of Philosophy in English, 2017
Old Dominion University (Norfolk, VA)
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Master of Arts in Communications (Film), 1989
Regent University (Virginia Beach, VA)

Bachelor of Arts, 1984
George Mason University (Fairfax, VA)
Studio Art (Drawing)

PRESENTATIONS

Networks, Nodes and Spaces In-Between: Borrowing Instructional Design Strategies to Cultivate an Audience. 2013 Popular Culture Association / American Culture Association joint conference (Washington, D.C).

Explosion Bus: Borrowing Pedagogical Strategies to Broaden an Audience, Cultivate a Fan Base and Make an Explosion on the Internet. 2012 Popular Culture Association / American Culture Association joint conference (Boston, MA).

Fan Communities as Marketing Tools: Tracing Discussions around a Marketing Campaign. 2011 Popular Culture Association/American Culture Association conference (San Antonio, TX).

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Elearning Developer: Oct 2014 to Mar 2016
Insight Global/New York Life (Sleepy Hollow, NY)

Learning and Development Designer: Mar 2014 to Aug 2014
The Computer Merchant/Starwood Hotels (Stamford, CT)

ORISE Fellow/E-Learning Developer: Nov 2011 to Nov 2013
Food and Drug Administration, Office of New Drugs, (Silver Spring, MD/telecommuting)

Instructional Designer/Media Producer: Nov 2004 to Jun 2011
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