Television 2.0: Reconceptualizing TV as an Engagement Medium

by

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ABSTRACT

Television is in a period of dramatic change. As the mass audience continues to fragment into ever-smaller niche audiences and communities of interest, and new technologies shift control over the television viewing experience from network programmers into the hands of media consumers, television's traditional business models prove themselves increasingly untenable. In an attempt to preserve these models, television executives are attempting to shed television's long-standing reputation as a passive medium, which emphasized the viewer's role as a consumer of television content, and which critics often decried as vacuous and mindless.

The current discourse suggests that television's future now relies on the industry's success recasting it as an active medium, capable of capturing and holding the audience's attention, and effective at generating emotional investment. The single most important concept in this new industrial discourse is that of audience "engagement", a term that has generated a tremendous amount of debate and disagreement, with television and advertising executives alike struggling to understand what engagement is, how it works, and what its practical consequences will be.

This thesis argues that television's future as an engagement medium relies not on inventing new methodoloies that define engagement in terms of quantifiable audience behaviors and attitudes, but instead in a new conceptual model of television, better suited to a multiplatform media environment and the emerging attention and experience economies, which focuses on the development of television programs that extend beyond the television set. Such a model must understand television not as a method for aggregating audiences that can be sold to advertisers, but as a medium that draws upon media platforms, content, products, activities and social spaces to provide audiences with a range of opportunities to engage with television content. Accordingly, this thesis offers a framework for thinking about viewer engagement as the range of opportunities and activities that become possible when drawing upon an expanded, multi-platform conception of the modern television text. Applying this framework to the innovative and experimental textual extensions developed around ABC's *Lost*, the thesis indicates both the challenges and opportunities that emerge as television becomes an engagement medium.

Thesis Supervisor: Henry Jenkins
Title: Professor of Comparative Media Studies

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INTRODUCTION

Television in Transition

In October 2006, claiming that the television business had arrived at a critical turning point, NBC President Jeff Zucker announced a dramatic initiative to upgrade the network to what he described as "NBC Universal 2.0." The initiative, which called for a near-complete overhaul of NBC's corporate structure and business operations, would leave the network better equipped to deal with a series of paradigm-threatening crises that now confront the television business. As Zucker explained, it was time for television executives to accept what he saw as an inescapable truth: "that the changes of the next five years will dwarf the changes of the last fifty."[1]

Less than a year later, the most dramatic changes are already underway, with the most significant of these relating to the slow but seemingly inevitable collapse of television's traditional advertiser-supported business models. As the mass audience continues to fragment into ever-smaller niche audiences and communities of interest, and new technologies shift control over the television viewing experience from network programmers into the hands of media consumers, television's traditional business models prove themselves increasingly untenable. In an attempt to preserve these models -- which see television first and foremost as a medium that connects advertisers to audiences – television executives are attempting to shed television's long-standing reputation as a passive medium, which emphasized the viewer's role as a consumer of television content, and which critics often decried as vacuous and mindless. The current discourse suggests that television's future now relies upon the industry's success in recasting it as an active medium, capable of capturing and holding the audience's attention, and effective at generating emotional investment.

The single most important concept in this new industrial discourse is that of audience engagement. The term "engagement" has generated a tremendous amount of debate and disagreement, as television executives and advertisers struggle to understand what it is, how it works, and what its practical consequences will be. In spite of these disagreements, however, there is a general consensus that television's future will

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[1] NBC. "NBC Universal Announces 'NBCU 2.0'." Press Release. 19 October 2006.

revolve around its emerging role as an "engagement medium," capable of generating a level of viewer attentiveness and emotional investment that restore television's status as an advertising medium.

Yet as television executives attempt to redefine both the medium and its business model in terms of engagement, the absence of a clear definition for engagement, as well as a clear metric for expressing and measuring it, pose a significant challenge.   Over the past several years, countless television executives, advertisers, and consulting firms have attempted to develop a "model" of engagement that is capable of predicting audience behavior, measuring that behavior, and correlating those measurements with desirable outcomes. However, despite their willingness to draw upon a wide range of disciplines and methodologies, not one of these models has been successful in these goals, for each has failed to develop a system that can describe, model and predict complex relationships and investments in quantifiable, systematic terms.

This thesis argues that understanding audience engagement with television in a meaningful way begins not with generalized theories and models about audience behaviors and attitudes, but by examining how several television programs have already succeeded in generating deep, perpetual audience engagement. As this thesis will illustrate, television is already using strategies and practices that create a range of opportunities for engagement, both through changes in television's basic form and content, and through an ever-greater reliance on program-related content, activities and social interactions that transform the practice of consuming television from a passive process that happens in front of the screen into an active, perpetual process that happens everywhere, and at all times. Thus, as John Caldwell has suggested, the increasing migration, integration and interaction of television content across a range of platforms requires a new and broader definition of the television text: one that accounts for the broader range of experiences and activities that television audiences now engage in, and all of which can be described as forms of audience engagement.

The formulation and elaboration of such a definition lies at the heart of this thesis.

Therefore, while the following chapters will focus on a more thorough consideration of engagement — what it is, what it means, why it matters — a few words are needed here to place the emerging discourse over engagement in a proper historical context.

A Brief History of the Television Business

If Zucker's warning "that the changes of the next five years will dwarf the changes of the last fifty" carries a hint of hyperbole, the fact remains that his basic assessment is accurate: the developments of the next five to ten years will dramatically transform the manner in which television executives, television producers, and audiences alike understand both the television business, and "television" itself. What Zucker's statement fails to acknowledge, however, is that the coming transformation of the television business has as much to do with the events of the past fifty years as it does with those of the next five.

During its first fifty years, the television business weathered a number of significant and transformative threats. The best-documented of these is the introduction of cable television, which — in addition to more reliable picture and sound — provided television audiences with an unprecedented number of programming choices, effectively marking the end of the "three network era."[2] Prior to the introduction of cable, programmers and advertisers were able to make certain assumptions about television audiences with relative confidence: at any given moment, viewers were watching the scheduled program airing on the few available channels. With the introduction of cable, however, the older three networks — NBC, ABC and CBS — were forced to compete with a wide range of programming, including a growing number of specialized channels designed to appeal to specific niche audiences and demographics. The resulting competition had a significant impact on the content of broadcast and cable television programming alike, as broadcast programmers struggled to improve network offerings and differentiate themselves from their cable rivals.

Even more significant, however, was the resulting fragmentation of television's "mass audience" — viewers that had previously chosen between a small handful of general-interest networks were now turning their attention to channels that better served their individual needs. Additional challenges emerged in the 1970s, with the introduction of the home video-cassette recorder (VCR), an appliance that allowed viewers to record television programming for later viewing. In so doing, the VCR struck another set of twin blows

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[2] The timeline on this is difficult to pin down, of course: the first cable transmitters provided better signal, but not a wealth of choice. Depending on your criteria, the introduction of cable took place anywhere between 1948 and 1980. For more details, see: Association, N J C T. "History of Cable," *cablenj.org.* 2005.

to television's existing business model: its owners were now free to watch television at their leisure, rather than conforming to the rigid broadcast schedule, and — even worse — they gained the power to skip through advertisements without watching them. Like cable, the VCR also contributed to a further fragmentation of the mass audience, providing individual viewers with an even greater level of choice over what to watch at any given moment.

In the past ten years, a series of technological developments have posed a new series of disruptive challenges to television. The commercial introduction of the digital video recorder (DVR) in 1999 has proven even more disruptive to the television business than the VCR. Services such as TiVo and ReplayTV, which encourage viewers to "program their own television stations," have revived industrial anxieties about both ad-skipping and further audience fragmentation. Partly in response to this threat, many networks and cable providers have embraced video-on-demand (VOD) distribution technologies that allow viewers to purchase and watch individual episodes of television programs whenever they choose.

The most significant challenges of all, however, have surfaced over the past few years, and result from the emergence of digital media devices (personal computers, handheld units, mobile phones) and the shift from analog to digital video. These developments, as Zucker implies, now threaten to disrupt the business models of the media and advertising industries altogether.

The television business, after all, is still built upon models and assumptions that existed in the earliest days of broadcasting: now, as then, television networks believe themselves to be in the business of audience aggregation. At its core, the television business has always served as broker in an unspoken, but well understood, transaction between viewers and advertisers, wherein the advertiser provides free television programming, and the viewer agrees to watch commercials. Over time, the models have become more sophisticated, of course (leading to the development of Nielsen ratings, audience shares, viewer demographics, and so on) but this implicit contract has remained at the heart of the television business.

As television has shifted to digital production and distribution, however, this contract has proven itself ever harder to enforce. Executives, advertisers, and audiences alike are beginning to realize that the conditions that once made this contract possible have all but collapsed. Time-shifting and location-shifting technologies make traditional assumptions about the television viewer impossible, since network executives no longer have the power to control when, where, or how audiences consume their programming. Competition for audience attention is more intense than ever, as television shows compete not only with each

other, but also with video games, DVDs, and the near-infinite supply of information and entertainment options accessible on the Internet.

Thus, if the television industry hopes to survive in a digital, Internet-enabled era, the existing models and practices that govern the television business will require some dramatic change. Even more important, if television executives hope to effect meaningful change, the industry will have to accept that everyone — executives, advertisers, and audiences alike — needs to rethink not only the role of the television business, but the nature of television itself.

From 'Television' to 'Content'

The truth, of course, is that this transformation in the nature of television has been underway for years. Even a decade ago, it was still fairly easy to define: television was the entertainment or information that entered one's home through antenna or the airwaves, and was available in real-time channels for viewing on a dedicated television set. Even when the VCR loosened the restrictions of the television schedule, the conditions of viewing still remained fundamentally the same: television was the audio-visual content that you watched on a television set, most often in your living room, and audiences knew it.

Ten years later, the situation has changed. Television shows can be accessed through a range of channels and on a range of platforms — including DVD, handheld media players, mobile phones, and the Internet — and this is where the problem begins. As television shows flow through a range of channels and devices, the traditional conflation of content and channel into a single term ("television") becomes more problematic. While *Desperate Housewives* is clearly a television program, it is less clear whether it becomes something different when viewed on computer, a mobile phone, or an iPod. The proliferation of short-form videos, clips excerpting favorite moments from television programs, and the flood of user-generated content on sites like YouTube and MySpace pose a similar question. And while it's simple enough to differentiate web-based and user-generated content – under the assumption that television programming must, at some point, be distributed as commercial content – shows such as VH1's *Web Junk 20* (which compiles the best user-generated clips from the internet site iFilm in a format similar to *America's Funniest Home Videos*) make such distinctions more difficult. The emergence of video-on-demand services, as well as the ability to purchase entire seasons of television programming on DVD, complicate matters even further. The

underlying question, in all of these cases, is whether the word "television" refers to a distribution platform (the television set), the content distributed through that platform (television programs), or the medium itself (television).

In *Convergence Culture*, Henry Jenkins draws upon Lisa Gitelman, who offers:

> A model of media that works on two levels: on the first, a medium is a technology that enables communication; on the second, a medium is a set of associated "protocols" or social and cultural practices that have grown up around that technology.[3]

In the context of this discussion, Gitelman's model helps cut to the core of television's modern identity crisis, which is the result of changes at both of these levels: on the first, because television no longer refers exclusively to a single technological medium, and on the second, because the "protocols" surrounding television are now in a state of flux.

This crisis in terms has prompted an important initial shift in the industrial discourse. In April 2006, while speaking about his involvement in a forthcoming internet-based reality-competition show called *Gold Rush*, television super-producer Mark Burnett declared, "I'm not a TV producer anymore, I'm a content producer."[4] A similar distinction was drawn just after Zucker's announcement of the NBC 2.0 initiative, when NBC News President Steve Capus explained that NBC, until now, had been "a TV business that dabbles in digital. Now we're positioning [ourselves] as a…content-production center that happens to do television."[5]

What viewers once described as television shows are now being subsumed under the broader title of "content," a term that reflects the industry's growing interest in creating media programming that can be distributed and accessed on a range of platforms. On some level, this is a simple rhetorical shift: same old thing, brand new name. At the same time, however, this rhetoric reveals at least two significant changes in the logic of the television industry.

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[3] Jenkins, H. *Convergence Culture*. 2006, 13-14.

[4] James, A. "Just Turn Off the TV." *Daily Variety*. 4 April 2006.

[5] Ahrens, F. "NBC Taking Big Step Back From Television," *The Washington Post*. 2006.

First, it frees television from the assumption that the channel of distribution (the domestic television set) is a defining aspect of the content that travels through it. Under this logic, television executives — and, in fact, *all* media executives — are actually in the content business, where content can be defined as 'a unit of information or entertainment product that can be sold or sponsored, and distributed through a diverse range of channels and platforms. In recognizing itself as a "content-production center," NBC is acknowledging that it is now in the same business as — and thus in direct competition with — all content producers. This effectively means that NBC's competition is no longer limited to rival networks, but has expanded to encompass the likes of Google and Microsoft.

At the same time, as Caldwell has observed, "the term 'content' frees programs from a year-long series and network-hosted logic and suggests that programs are quantities to be drawn and quartered, deliverable on cable, shippable internationally, and streamable on the Net."[6] In recasting themselves as "content producers" rather than "television networks," media companies such as NBC may face a much wider field of competitors, but they also have the freedom to expand the scope and ambition of their business operations: across platforms, across channels, and across international lines. After all, the domestic audience might be getting smaller by the week, but the global television audience is a different story altogether[7].

However one chooses to describe their occupation, the fact remains that television executives, like all media producers, are now struggling to understand the changing principles and dynamics of today's hyper-competitive "content market." The proliferation of entertainment and information sources available to audiences has resulted in an intensified competition to attract and retain audience interest (or "mindshare," as it is often described among advertisers). For all intents and purposes, this increase in consumer options means that we are now operating in an attention economy, where media producers and advertisers view

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[6] Caldwell, J. "Convergence Television." *Television After TV*, eds. Spigel and Olsson. 2004, 49.
[7] While the global market for television is a significant factor in the possible shift to new engagement-based business models suggested in this thesis, a thorough analysis of the topic falls outside the scope of this discussion. It should also be noted that this shift toward networks having a firm investment in their own content owes a great deal to the FCC's 1995 repeal of the Financial Interest and Syndication Rules, which had been implemented in 1970 to prevent vertical integration in broadcasting by preventing the major television networks from owning any of their primetime programming.

attention itself as the most valuable of commodities, and it is the pursuit of viewer attention that has led the media and advertising industries to their newest point of obsession: audience engagement.

The current industrial obsession with engagement begins with the assumption that the traditional "mass audience" is dead. Faced with a proliferation of media options and content choices, the mass audience – so critical in television's earliest years – has fragmented into a million niche audiences and communities. This is not to say that there are no large audiences: insofar as they can be trusted, Nielsen ratings still indicate that the most popular television shows can attract significant audiences. Fragmentation simply suggests that a mass audience can no longer be taken for granted. Since television's traditional business model is predicated on the implicit contract between audiences (who consume television programming) and advertisers (whose funding makes the production of commercial television programming possible), this fragmentation of the mass audience poses a significant problem to advertisers in general, and television advertisers in particular.

After all, the historical power of television advertising has been a function of the medium's *reach*, or the number of viewers exposed to a given advertisement. If a prime-time advertisement ran on one of the three big networks in the 1960s, the advertisers could assume that their message was reaching 80 percent of the women in the United States; if even a small fraction of those viewers responded to the advertisement, it could be considered a worthwhile investment. Today, however, it has been estimated that the same advertisement would need to run on one hundred channels (or more) to reach the same number of viewers.[8] Factor in the steep prices of network broadcast advertising, where the cost for 30-second advertising slots often starts at $100,000, and the rising number of viewers skipping over advertisements when watching shows on DVR – which, according to a Nielsen statement released in May 2007, is around 60% in the critical 18-49 demographic[9] – and you almost begin to feel bad for the advertisers.

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[8] Jenkins. 66.
[9] Bauder, D. "More than half of DVR viewers skipping commercials, Nielsen says in first ad study." *Associated Press*. 31 May 2007.

$100,000 is a lot of money to spend on an ad that no one's watching.

Even if viewers weren't skipping over advertisements, it remains unclear whether mere exposure to advertising has any significant influence on a given viewer's behavior or purchasing habits. Regardless, advertisers are now gradually beginning to re-evaluate both their traditional business model and the assumptions that governed it.

In April 2002, an editorial printed in *Advertising Age* magazine proposed that the industry needed "a new definition of 'prime time.' To be designated prime time, a medium must be capable of riveting its audience—and that connection must be measured."[10] In their attempt to create programming that "rivets" the audience, television executives now find themselves struggling to transform television from a medium defined by passive consumption to one characterized by active — and wherever possible, interactive — engagement.

The driving force behind these efforts is the common-sense assumption that television shows will be most effective in attracting and retaining viewers — and as such, meeting the needs of television advertisers — if viewers are "more engaged." The problem with common sense, however, is that even the most obvious claims can be difficult to "prove" in quantitative terms — and since advertisers are beginning to demand just this sort of quantitative measurement to prove that audiences are engaging with television programs, this is a serious problem indeed. As Jenkins recently observed,

> While they are increasingly interested in the qualities of the audience experience, the media and brand companies still struggle with the economic side of affective economics—the need to quantify desire, to measure connections, and to commodify commitments—and perhaps most importantly of all, the need to transform all of the above into return on investment (ROI).

> These bottom-line pressures often deflect attempts to understand the complexity of audience behavior even when such knowledge is desperately needed by companies that want to survive in the coming decades. Rather than rethinking the terms of their analysis, they are struggling to fit these new insights into familiar economic categories. It is still a world where what can be counted is what counts most.[11]

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[10] Rossi, D. "Rethink 'Prime Time'." *Advertising Age.* 2002.

[11] Jenkins. 66.

The goal of this thesis, then, is to introduce and articulate a new set of frameworks that might help television executives "rethink the terms of their analysis."

Chapter 1 (The Elusive Concept of Engagement) introduces a series of industrial and academic approaches to defining and formulating a generalized model of audience engagement, and outlines the problematic assumptions and miscalculations that have undermined both the application and utility of each approach. Building upon this discussion, the first chapter will establish that a meaningful understanding of modern viewer engagement, both as a conceptual process and as a set of audience practices, requires a shift in focus from attempting to determine new ways of measuring audience behavior to considering the new opportunities for audience to engage with television.

Accordingly, **Chapter 2** (The Expanded Television Text), shifts the focus of discussion from the problematic current attempts to understand engagement in relation to viewer behaviors and attitudes toward television programming, and instead offers a new framework for thinking about viewer engagement as the range of opportunities and activities that become possible when drawing upon an expanded, multi-platform conception of the modern television text. More specifically, the framework introduced in this chapter offers an initial set of descriptive categories that organize the range of possible television-related 'sites of engagement' that have been developed in recent years. To do so, I draw upon a wide range of examples to illustrate and critique the various strategies and initiatives through which the television industry – and as such, the expanded television text – enable or encourage various forms of audience engagement.

Building upon this framework, **Chapter 3** (Five Logics of Engagement) outlines a series of basic "logics" for understanding and describing various forms of audience engagement. Drawing upon existing literature in fan studies and media research, each of these logics is predicated on understanding the nature of a specific desire or motive or desire that can dictate the terms of an individual viewer's engagement with television texts: entertainment, social connection, mastery, immersion and identification. In the process, this chapter also suggests that some logics of engagement are more applicable to certain programs, and viewers, than others.

Drawing upon the framework introduced in the second chapter, as well as the logics introduced in the third, **Chapter 4** (*Lost* At Television's Crossroads) considers how ABC's *Lost* provides an example of a program standing at the crossroads of television's past and future. While *Lost* has been tremendously successful in demonstrating the new possibilities for active, cross-platform viewer engagement that emerge as part of the expanded television text, it has also failed to take advantage of the new business models and opportunities that such active engagement might sustain. Instead, both *Lost* and the innovative and experimental textual extensions developing around it remain subjugated to the rhetoric and logic that understand television almost exclusively in terms of its traditional role as an advertiser-supported medium. In the process, I describe how several of *Lost*'s opportunities for engagement have prompted new patterns of audience behavior, reflecting a more expansive and accommodating model of television textuality, while also suggesting and anticipating new business opportunities predicated the deep, perpetual engagement that viewers now demonstrate when interacting with television texts.

Finally, the **Conclusion** (The Future of Engagement) acknowledges some of the most immediate problems that emerge as part of television's transformation into an engagement medium, and suggests possible directions for future research.

Having established that the current industrial emphasis on creating engaged viewers results from a desire to preserve television's traditional advertiser-supported business model, the following chapter examines the efforts that have been made toward formulating a definition of engagement, establishing methodologies for recognizing and quantifying engagement, and theorizing the role that engaged audiences might play in television's future.

After reviewing these industrial approaches – all of which attempt to explain viewer engagement through minor variations on the traditional behavioral and attitudinal models that have long characterized audience research – as well as two key academic projects that explore more nuanced and multi-dimensional approaches, I will argue that the ongoing attempt to express and model the emerging concept of viewer engagement in such traditional audience measurement terms is a flawed endeavor, and suggest a new definition for engagement. This definition redirects the discussion to focus on understanding the concept of engagement not as "how the audience watches television," but as "what an expanded notion of television

allows the audience to do with television." As such, the focus of the next chapter is somewhat different than that of the chapters that follow it; while the subsequent chapters will articulate a new approach to understanding engagement, the first chapter interrogates existing proposals regarding the nature of viewer engagement in order to demonstrate the deeper problems that impede the television industry from moving forward.

CHAPTER 1

The Elusive Concept of Engagement

The current discussion about audience engagement begins with the assumption that the future of the television business hinges on developing new and more effective methods for proving that television advertising has a measurable impact on viewers. In the past, television ads were evaluated in terms of "impressions": the number of individual viewers who were exposed to an advertising message. This traditional emphasis on reaching as many viewers as possible has become more problematic as new technologies and distribution channels emerge, fragmenting the mass audience and intensifying the competition for viewer attention. In response, the television industry has started to embrace the notion that "engaged" audiences may prove more valuable than large audiences.

While there is little consensus on the exact definition of engagement, most of the industrial debate around the subject seems to agree that engagement, however one defines it, describes the following process:

(1) The viewer decides to watch a television program.

(2) The viewer is "engaged" with the content of the program.

(3) The viewer will accordingly do one or more of the following:

    a. Watch the entire program without changing channels.

    b. Become a regular and loyal viewer of the program.

    c. Be a more attentive viewer when watching the program.

(4) As an added bonus, the viewer may also:

    a. Become passionate about the program.

    b. Convince others to watch the program as well.

(5) All of the possible results listed in (3) and (4), in turn, benefit the program's advertisers, since each of these outcomes increase the odds of the viewer being exposed to, aware of, and persuaded by the advertisement.

(6) Furthermore, through a process of transference, the viewer's positive feelings toward the program will "spill over," making the viewer more receptive to advertising appearing during the program.

As the fifth and sixth steps of this progression reveal, the industrial discourse around viewer engagement ultimately constitutes an attempt to solve the various problems that threaten to render television's traditional advertising-supported business model untenable.

Television executives are relying on the concept of engagement to prove that television advertising still works, by establishing that while television broadcasts might reach fewer viewers now than in the past, it is making a deep, lasting and effective impression on those viewers who are watching. This means that the entire discourse around engagement, at least thus far, has fundamentally been a discussion about how to preserve the existing advertiser-supported business model that has been in place since the three-network era.

1. Industrial Approaches to Engagement

With that in mind, the first section of this chapter considers the various ways in which the television industry has attempted to express, define, measure and operationalize the concept of engagement, since (as suggested in the *Advertising Age* editorial) understanding the importance of a viewer's connection to media content is not enough: that connection must also be measured.

1.1. Struggling for Definition

On February 28, 2006, the Magazine Publishers of America released a report entitled *Engagement: Understanding Consumers' Relationships with Media*, which compiled then-recent findings on engagement from 35 third party research studies.[1] While the report drew upon the available literature to outline a number of dimensions and factors that might influence audience engagement, it did not attempt to provide

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[1] Mandese, J. "MPA Hopes to Engage Media Buyers, Releases Report on Engagement." *MediaDaily News*. 28 February 2006.

an operational definition for the term. However, it did raise two important considerations that are often overlooked or ignored when formulating possible models for explaining and measuring engagement.

First, the report warned researchers that, "a variety of exposure and relationship factors affect engagement," and that, as such, "simple rankings may be misleading." Second, and more important, the MPA report warned that "engagement with a medium often differs from engagement with its advertising."[2] Since much of the ongoing discussion about engagement hinges on the assumption that increase viewer engagement with television content will result in increased engagement with television advertising, this poses a significant problem to several conceptual models of engagement currently in use.

While the MPA report did not offer an explicit definition for engagement, the title of the report itself implied that engagement, as a term, was being used to refer to "a consumer's relationship with media content." The problem with this definition, of course, is that relationships are complex and multi-dimensional entities, which makes them harder to describe and measure in quantifiable terms than, for example, the easier binary of "watching" and "not-watching". And, since the entire industrial discourse around engagement revolves around the need to express, measure and model the nature and depth of these "consumer relationships," the advertising and media industries agreed that a more "functional" definition for engagement was required.

Fortunate, then, that a committee had been formed seven months earlier to formulate just such a definition. In July 2005, a consortium of advertising research groups led by the Advertising Research Foundation (ARF) announced the launch of a joint-endeavor entitled *Measurement Initiative: Advertisers, Agencies, Media and Researchers* or "MI4."[3] The members of this committee were charged with two tasks: finding a working definition for engagement, and beginning to develop a series of metrics for measuring it. According to ARF President Bob Barocci, a concise definition of engagement would "lay the groundwork for

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[2] Engagement: Understanding Consumers' Relationships with Media (Magazine Publishers of America, 2006), 35.

[3] The consortium consisted of the Association of National Advertisers (ANA), the American Association of Advertising Agencies (4As) and the Advertising Research Foundation (ARF).

the evolution to a new method of measurement that reflects the complexity of today's media choices and consumer-empowered media consumption."[4]

On March 21, 2006, just three weeks after the release of the MPA report, the ARF announced that the MI4 committee had arrived at a working definition. In an official statement, Joe Plummer, chief research officer of the ARF, unveiled the new definition:

Engagement is turning on a prospect to a brand idea enhanced by the surrounding media context.[5]

Immediately, this definition presents a number of serious problems.

The first of these problems concerns the imprecise language of the definition. When MI4 declares that engagement "is turning on a prospect to a brand idea," it is unclear whether the definition's focus on "turning on a prospect" refers to a specific moment or a cumulative process that takes place over time. If it refers to a moment, this implies that there is, in fact, a specific moment when the viewer is "turned on" to a brand. Alternately, it may be suggesting that engagement be understood as an overall process, consisting of repeated exposure to strategic advertising that "turns on" a viewer over time?

Similarly, the MI4 definition remains silent as to the exact meaning of "turning on a prospect," a term which could describe a range of possible relationships, including:

- Generating viewer *awareness* of a brand

- Generating viewer *interest* in a brand

- Generating viewer *investment* in a brand, whether emotional or intellectual

- Generating viewer *actions*, such as purchasing or endorsing a brand.

The second significant problem that the MI4 definition poses stems from its explicit (and controversial) assumption that the "surrounding media context" in which a brand message is presented can "enhance" the brand message itself. Here, too, the definition is vague in its claim, failing to indicate whether

[4] Blackshaw, P. "Get Ready to Engage With The Engagement Metric." *Clickz*. 26 July 2005.

[5] Mandese, J. "Ad Group Announces Definition for 'Engagement,' Fails to State It." *MediaDaily News*. 21 March 2006.

the "surrounding media context" refers to the "passive" context (i.e., the program or content during which an advertising spot appears) or the "active" context (i.e., the specific attitude with which the content itself "frames" the brand message).

In plainer terms, it is unclear what the MI4 definition of engagement was referring to. The definition might have been describing the possibility that viewers interpret television programs as implicit endorsements for the products advertised during their commercial breaks. Or, it might have been describing situations where a program's content takes an explicit stance regarding a product, as shows increasingly do when integrating brand messages and products into a show's content.

In either case, the most significant flaw in the MI4 definition is its implicit claim that the media content surrounding an advertisement determines how receptive viewers will be to the brand messages accompanying that content. In short, the MI4 definition assumes that when viewers are "engaged" with the content they are watching, they will consequently be more "engaged" with the brand messages that appear while they are watching it. However, as the MPA report had observed less than a month earlier, "engagement with a medium often differs from engagement with its advertising,"[6] making this assumption a problematic one at best.

On the other hand, the MI4 initiative was driven by a consortium of advertising agencies, groups who – as this chapter has already suggested – were formulating definitions of engagement for the sole purpose of better understanding how viewer engagement might save a collapsing business model which had been built upon the now-dated foundation of "reach" and "impressions." As a result, the MI4 committee had set out to develop a working definition describing not "viewer" engagement but "consumer" engagement; if their definition of engagement failed to capture the more complex and multi-dimensional practice of viewer engagement with television content, it was most likely because their interest in engagement began and ended with the need to preserve television's role as an effective advertising medium.

Yet for all of its shortcomings, the MI4 definition of engagement succeeded in generating a new level of debate and conversation on the topic within both the media and advertising industries. During the

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[6] Engagement: Understanding Consumers' Relationships with Media, 35.

month following the MI4 announcement alone, trade journals, blogs and mainstream newspapers ran

countless articles about the "engagement problem," and offered a range of possible definitions and metrics.

Near the end of the April, advertising executives participating in a engagement-focused panel at *Media*

Magazine's "Outfront Conference" explained (with more than a hint of exasperation) that there were now, if

anything, too many possible definitions for engagement. As one panelist reported:

> We're talking to one agency who thinks that loyalty is an important factor, and they measure that by the
> number of people who have watched three out of four episodes. Another thinks it's persistence, and that's
> measured by numbers of minutes watched per show. And there's others who want to look at
> 'persuasiveness'. We actually did a literature review and there are 85 different words and phrases that
> people have used to get at this concept [of engagement].[7]

More than a year later, this is still the state of the engagement debate: as more and more possible definitions

are formulated, the discussion gets more crowded and unfocused, until the only thing that seems clear is that

there is no clear definition of engagement.

1.2. Measuring Engagement

Instead, the discussion is flooded with a wide range of possible definitions and proposed metrics,

each offering its own methodological approach, as well as its own set of unique strengths and weaknesses.

(Eight of the most prominent of these are listed in *Table 1: Alternate Proposals for Measuring Engagement*.)

Despite their differences, however, almost all of the engagement metrics proposed thus far draw upon one or

more of the following three approaches:

(1) Viewer Attitudes. Several studies have proposed that a viewer's engagement with television

content can be described as a function of their attitudes toward that content. The current range of

engagement models based on "attitudinal data" includes QScores ("likeability"), Jack Myers' Media Business

Report ("emotional connections"), MediaVest ("impressions"), Simmons ("emotional involvement") and

Nielsen ("attitudes"). In all of these models, viewer attitudes are determined and quantified through the use

of proprietary surveys and questionnaires, which ask viewers to provide numerical responses indicating their

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[7] Sass, E. "Engagement Panel: No Currency, No Clarity." *MediaDaily News*. 28 April 2006.

agreement with a standardized list of statements (e.g. "This show makes me feel good about life," or "I can relate to one or more characters on this show."). On the basis of this data, researchers then use formulas to determine whether viewers have strong, positive feelings about their chosen television content; if they do, the program will receive a high "engagement score," which is meant to suggest that the viewer's positive feelings toward the program will be transferred onto the advertisers who appear during the program through a "halo effect" which results in the transference of engagement from a program ("the surrounding media context," to draw upon the ARF's language) to an advertisement or brand message.

TABLE 1: ALTERNATE PROPOSALS FOR MEASURING ENGAGEMENT

COMPANY	PROJECT NAME	YEAR	MEASURES
Marketing Evaluations, Inc.	Q Scores	1963	"Likeability"
Jack Myers' Media Business Report	Emotional Connections Research	1999	Emotional connections, Viewer engagement
Initiative Media	Favorite Program Study	2003	Relevance, affinity, comfort, resonance
MediaVest Group (SMG)	EnQ	2005	Impressions and opinions of programs
Simmons Research	National Multimedia Engagement Study	2006	Cognitive, behavioral, emotional involvement with programming
Nielsen Media Research	n/a	2006	Recall, awareness, attitudes towards brands and products
Innerscope Research	innGage, innCite, innForm	2007	Moment-by-moment neurological and biological response to content
IAG Research	Program Engagement	2007	Recall of program details

In *Pathways to Measuring Consumer Behavior* (2002)[8], the authors provided a table of previous studies on media channel effectiveness, indicating each study's chosen term of measurement; this table can be read as a supplement which updates that table to include some of the newest studies. Additional details about each of the engagement models listed in the table above are provided in Appendix I, at the end of this document.

The fundamental flaw in this approach, of course, is the still unproven assumption that such engagement transference is possible, or, failing that, that engagement with program content will help "condition" the viewer to be more receptive to advertising messages. At present, this assumption is at best

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[8] Koerner, S L, *et al.* "Pathways to Measuring Consumer Behavior in an Age of Media Convergence." Advertising Research Foundation/ESOMAR Conference. June 2002. Figure 3

problematic and inconsistent, and at worst, entirely inaccurate. Indeed, while some studies seem to support claims about engagement transference, other studies "prove" just the opposite, and suggest that viewers are more likely to develop negative attitudes toward brands advertised on their favorite programs, since the advertisements are disrupting their pleasurable enjoyment of a show's content.

(2) Viewer Behaviors. Another common approach to measuring engagement suggests that a viewer's engagement with television content can be described as a function of their behaviors in relation to that content. Thus, several proposed definitions of engagement focus on such criteria as "persistence" (the number of minutes that a viewer spends tuned into a program) and "loyalty" (the number of times that a viewer watches a specific show over a predetermined period of time). Others, such as the relatively recent models introduced by Innerscope Research, take an even more rigorous behavioral approach: through the use of sensors, researchers monitor individual viewers, gathering biological and neurological data that indicates their emotional involvement during each second spent watching television content. This behavioral data is then used to determine a viewer's overall engagement with a program.

Such an approach is at least as problematic as the attitude-based approach described above, if not more so, for it uses decontextualized data to draw conclusions about a viewer's attitude and depth of commitment toward television content, and then use these conclusions to predict how viewers will respond to advertisements, and when viewers will be the most susceptible to influence. As such, behavioral metrics of engagement suffer from the same problematic assumption of engagement transference as attitudinal metrics.

(3) Viewer Attentiveness. The third (and most widely utilized) approach to measuring engagement uses an even more reductionist approach, and proposes that a viewer's engagement with television content can be described as a function of the viewer's attentiveness during the viewing experience, as well as the viewer's ability to recall program-related details after viewing.

In the absence of a single, clear definition, then, the most widely accepted model of engagement uses the term to describe the "degree of attention" with which consumers are watching television programming. While this definition may fail to provide a nuanced account of the viewer's relationship to media content, it still succeeds in addressing the industry's most immediate need: a "meaningful metric" that will convince advertisers to continue investing their resources in television spots. Attention, after all, is not hard to

measure. As another member of the April 2006 panel suggested, an engagement metric could be as simple as "ask[ing] the consumer something that suggests that they're involved with the program."[9] And in February 2007, less than four months after Zucker's initial announcement that NBC would revitalize itself as "NBC 2.0," the network introduced an engagement metric that did precisely that.

Speaking at the ARF Consumer Engagement Conference in September 2006, Alan Wurtzel, NBCU President of Research and Media Development, declared, "Nielsen metrics still aren't ready for prime time… [and] if they can't do it, we're going to seek partners who can."[10] Five months later, true to his word, Wurtzel announced that the network was prepared to begin offering advertisers "guaranteed audience engagement," using measurement data from IAG Research.[11]

While the specific methodologies behind IAG's data are not public knowledge, Wurtzel explained that the system is designed to provide a simple gauge of the viewer's attentiveness: "If you answer 20 out of 20 questions [about a show] correctly, you're probably engaged. If you answer only three out of 20 right, you're probably not."[12] A March 2007 article in *MediaBuyerPlanner* offered a bit more detail on IAG's approach:

> IAG has 150 people come into the company's NY headquarters each night to watch everything on the broadcast networks as well as shows on 20 different cable networks. A portion of the group separately watches every commercial. Then they put together a detailed questionnaire that is posed to an online panel of 5,500 people the next day. Based on the answers, an engagement score is assigned to each show and commercial.[13]

According to Wurtzel, NBC is basing its new offer on an experimental advertising deal that the network struck with Toyota during the 2006 upfront. Through their partnership with IAG, NBC claims to have developed a series of "engagement norms for different types of programming, including comedies,

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[9] Sass. "Engagement Panel: No Currency, No Clarity."

[10] Blum, L. "NBC Exec Stresses Accountability." *Adweek*. 29 September 2006.

[11] NBC. "NBC to Guarantee Audience Engagement for Its Programming." Press Release. 28 February 2007.

[12] Ibid. Press Release.   It's interesting to note that in the same announcement, Wurtzel also acknowledged: "there's very little agreement on what [engagement] is, how to effectively measure it, and … how we transform it from a kind of interesting research concept to something we can actually do business on."

[13] "The Coming Conversation on TV Viewer Engagement." *MediaBuyerPlanner*. 19 March 2007. Though MBP's article didn't mention it, NBC's announcement also revealed that IAG draws upon a pool of 1.5 million members for its surveys.

dramas and sports," and has already used the metric to provide guarantees to 'about half a dozen advertisers.' The result has been positive, as Wurtzel announced, "to the point that we are now rolling out engagement as a guaranteed metric for the coming upfront to any clients who are interested."[14]

Ironically, out of the three possible approaches toward developing an engagement metric described above, NBC chose to throw its weight behind the most problematic. After all, in equating "attentiveness" with "engagement," IAG's engagement metric offers nothing more than an indication of whether a television program (and, in turn, that program's embedded advertising) is reaching the viewer at all. While this might be useful information – and indeed, it is proving to be the minimum guarantee that many advertisers require in order to continue investing in television advertising – it impoverishes the concept of engagement to so great an extent that it becomes nothing more than a desperate attempt to defend traditional television advertising.

As a result, IAG's engagement metric may prove that viewers are watching, but it provides no insight whatsoever into the depth or nature of a viewer's actual investment in, or relationship to, the content being watched. Lacking even the potential richness of attitudinal data, NBC's chosen metric acts as little more than a receipt, indicating that the consumer has received a given transmission without revealing anything about the nature of the consumer's response to the content of the transmission. Thus, IAG's model of engagement is incapable even of distinguishing between positive and negative engagement – a limitation that should worry NBC and their advertisers far more than it has.

It is also important to recognize that all of the models of engagement described above, whether based on attitudes, behaviors or attentiveness, suffer from another critical shortcoming: while each of these models might describe different aspects or manifestations of a viewer's engagement while watching television content, none of them reflect the essential fact that a viewer's engagement with television extends far beyond the core viewing experience.

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[14] NBC. "NBC to Guarantee Audience Engagement for Its Programming." Press Release.

1.3. Rethinking The Television Text

What makes this limited focus on television viewing as the lone site of engagement so problematic is the instinctive knowledge that the modern experience of television does not begin and end with the practice of watching television programs, but instead encompasses a viewer's consumption of, or interaction with, a wide range of program-related content and activities. After all, while the television industry appears to be incapable of formulating a clear definition and metric for audience engagement, television executives and producers have been far more successful in creating content, activities and strategic initiatives that provide television viewers with opportunities to deepen their involvement with their favorite programs.

In fact, opportunities for audience engagement are everywhere, and even a cursory review of the official websites for the five major broadcast networks (ABC, CBS, NBC, FOX, CW) hints at the enormous range of engagement opportunities that are being developed. Almost every program on television has a dedicated Internet presence, with common features including detailed information about the show, a wealth of downloadable promotional material, show-related merchandise available for purchase, and public discussion forums. Furthermore, in the past two years each of the networks has experimented with more elaborate digital initiatives and interactive offerings.

A few recent examples from the major broadcast networks:

ABC encourages viewers of the medical romance drama *Grey's Anatomy* to extend their relationship with the show through several exclusive weblogs, ranging from *Grey Matter*, where the show's writers offer exclusive "behind the scenes" anecdotes and insights, to *The Nurse's Station*, a gossip blog "written" by one of the show's characters.[15] ABC has also developed an "interactive television" project called *EnhancedTV*, which allowed viewers to interact with each other and participate in activities during the live on-air broadcasts of the network's most popular shows.[16]

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[15] ABC-Greys, Grey Matter: From the Writers of Grey's Anatomy, Available: http://www.greyswriters.com.. ABC-Greys, The Nurse's Station, Available: http://www.seattlegracegossip.com..

[16] ABC, EnhancedTV Initiative, Available: http://etv.go.com.. No longer available at the time of this writing.

The **CBS** website provides opportunities for interested viewers to interact with almost all of their best-known programs. In the case of *CSI: Crime Scene Investigation*, their most popular drama series, CBS now encourages online visitors to create and share their own "mash-ups" of video footage from the show[17], contribute their ideas and observations to the show's official wiki[18]. In 2006, the show's website also featured an "interactive crime scene," letting viewers inspect the crime scene that would be depicted the final two episodes of the season, in order to gather their own clues and theories before the episodes aired[19].

While **FOX**'s most notable efforts toward generating audience participation have been tied to *American Idol*[20], their website provides exclusive additional content for most of their flagship programs. Fans of *24* can watch *24inside*, a series of behind-the-scenes featurettes and interviews[21]; post photos of themselves on an interactive fan map[22]; and vote in weekly polls about the show's narrative developments[23].

And **NBC**, which has embraced audience engagement as a critical component of its NBC 2.0 initiative, now places a high emphasis on creating spaces for viewer participation and interaction with most of their shows. During the 2006-2007 television season, NBC's most elaborate campaign (developed around the new serial drama *Heroes*) included a companion series of "interactive graphic novels" that expand upon plot points from the broadcast episodes[24]; ongoing blogs from both the show's creator[25] and its most popular character[26]; an elaborate online mystery game[27], a web forum where viewers were given direct access to the show's creative team and cast[28], and a great deal more. With more than a month remaining until the

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[17] CBS-CSI, <u>CSI (NAME?)</u>, Available: http://keppler.cbs.com.

[18] CBS-CSI, <u>CSI Wiki</u>, Available: http://csiwiki.cbs.com.

[19] CBS-CSI, <u>CSI: Diner (NAME?)</u>, Available: http://www.cbs.com/primetime/csi/diner.

[20] For more details on American Idol's innovations in audience interaction, see Jenkins. 59-92., as well as Koerner, S L, *et al.* "Walking the Path: Exploring the Drivers of Expression." Advertising Research Foundation/ESOMAR Conference. June 2003. .

[21] FOX-24, <u>24inside</u>, Available: http://www.24inside.com.

[22] FOX-24, <u>24 Map (NAME?)</u>, Available: http://24map.fox.com.

[23] FOX-24, <u>24: Official Website</u>, Available: http://fox.com/24/.

[24] NBC-Heroes, <u>Heroes: Interactive Graphic Novel</u>, 2006, Available: http://www.nbc.com/Heroes/novels/index.shtml.

[25] Kring, T. "A Message to the Fans!"

[26] NBC-Heroes, <u>Hiro's Blog</u>, 2006, Available: http://blog.nbc.com/hiro_blog/.

[27] The *Heroes* game, often described online as an ARG (alternate reality game), began with the on-air appearance of a new website address. (www.primatechpaper.com).

[28] NBC-Heroes, <u>9th Wonders: Message Boards</u>, 2006, Available: http://www.9thwonders.com/boards/.

start of the 2007-2008 television season, NBC has already released a lengthy list of new show-extending projects and campaigns that will launch during the coming year.

In addition, all of the major broadcast networks, along with a vast number of cable networks, are now taking steps to offer episodes of selected shows as high-quality streaming video, and many of the most popular shows on television are now available as paid downloads through services such as Apple's iTunes Store and Microsoft's XBox Live. A growing number of networks are moving to offer either video clips or full episodes to mobile phone customers, and many popular shows are developing original and repurposed wireless content as well.

Even without a clear definition of engagement, all of these projects and initiatives can be understood as strategic offerings designed to encourage stronger, deeper relationships between viewers and television programs – or, in short, of generating greater audience engagement. Each of these strategic extensions and interactive features help to generate and maintain active audience engagement with current television programming, and reflect what John Caldwell has described as a growing industrial emphasis on "dot-com/TV permutations and TV-web synergies." As Caldwell points out, "the most effective Web sites for TV succeed by keeping viewer-users engaged long after a series episode has aired, and this requires greatly expanding the notion of what a TV text is."[29]

Viewed from this perspective, the existing models that have been proposed for defining and measuring engagement appear even more insufficient, for each is crippled by the implicit assumption that a viewer's engagement with television occurs exclusively in front of the television set. If the convergence of television and Internet-based content requires an expanded notion of the modern TV text, it also requires a broader approach to measuring audience engagement. More specifically, a comprehensive model for understanding engagement needs to consider not just how viewers perceive and relate to the television shows they watch, but how they construct and develop their relationship with a program through their use – or non-use – of the various initiatives that allow them to deepen or expand their interaction with it.

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[29] Caldwell. 51.

Ad*VIZR New Media Audit
33 Engagement Touchpoints

I) Linear Broadcast Enhancements
1.   Synchronous PC Application
2.   Addressable Targeting
3.   HD Television
4.   HD Radio
5.   Satellite Radio
6.   IP-delivered video

II) Internet Program Enhancements
7.   Rich e-mail reminders
8.   Streaming media capability
9.   Wallpapers
10.   Avatars/Icons
11.   Live Chat
12.   Message Boards
13.   Outtakes
14.   Blogs
15.   Synchronous Games/Trivia

III) Wireless
16.   SMS Polling
17.   Voice Reminders
18.   Wallpapers
19.   Ringtones
20.   Mobisodes
21.   Synchronous Mobile Apps
22.   Video Reminders
23.   M (Mobile) Coupons
24.   Avatars

IV) Video on Demand
25.   MSO FVOD Channel Distribution
26.   Cable Walled Garden Distribution

V) Other Portal Distribution
27.   VOD distributed via Broadband

VI) Digital OuterNet Extensions
28.   POS Networks
29.   POP Kiosks
30.   Digital OOH Networks

VII) Apple (Ad-Supported)
31.   iTunes Audio Podcasts
32.   iTunes Video
33.   iTunes Webisodes

1.4. The Ad*VIZR New Media Audit

At least in principle, *The Ad*VIZR New Media Audit* was intended to provide just such a model. Developed by a small division of Initiative Media called "The Consumer Experience Practice" (CEP) in the months leading up to its introduction at the May 2006 television upfronts, the *Ad*VIZR* model attempted to audit the entire range of existing digital extensions that had been developed to encourage viewer engagement with television programming. Impressive in its scope, the *Ad*VIZR* report covered all six active broadcast networks, as well as 49 cable networks and eight syndicators, and accounted for 2,233 individual television shows, including entertainment, news and sports programming.

From this data, CEP assembled a list of 33 different possible "digital touchpoints" that programmers could use to allow online audience engagement with their shows. According to the report's introduction, the Ad*VIZR model had been developed to help advertisers understand how, and why, they should participate in the development of content extensions:

Through our research in fan culture behavior, we know that as viewers engage with the core television content they love through these various touchpoints, so too can they engage with brands in new ways, creating new relationships that add value for advertisers. By sponsoring a new experience that extends program engagement rather than disrupting it, brands can strengthen their contextual involvement and connection with the consumer.[30]

As the creation of a group called the Consumer

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[30] Ad*VIZR™ New Media Audit 2006/07 (Interpublic Media Group, 2006), 1.

Experience Practice, it might seem reasonable to assume that the Ad*VIZR model would, in fact, have been designed to help the group's clients understand television engagement in terms of the viewer's (consumer's) experience. Yet the substance of the audit focused less on user experience than on industry statistics, revealing such details as:

- The average television program today offers consumers 4.7 (out of 33 possible) ways to extend their experience in digital spaces."

- Just over 50% of all television programs surveyed offered message boards, making message boards the most popular digital extension available during the research period.

- The program genres offering the highest number of extensions were Daytime Drama (with an average of 8.8 extensions per show), Serialized Drama (8/show) and Game Shows (7/show).[31]

1.5. Challenging Ad*VIZR's Approach

At first glance, these statistics appear to provide a useful gauge of the television industry's efforts to integrate new media. Upon closer reading, however, the Ad*VIZR report presents a number of serious problems, both in its structure and in its entire conceptual approach to creating a measurable set of criteria for transmedia engagement. Six of these problems, in particular, are worth acknowledging

(1) The Ad*VIZR model uses inconsistent logic in its formulation of touchpoints. Most of the statistics calculated in the Ad*VIZR audit are based upon a simple quantitative measure: how many of the 33 listed touchpoints each show has utilized. For this to be a meaningful number, however, it must be possible — at least in theory — for any given show to implement all 33 digital extensions. Even a cursory review of the list shows that this is not the case; many of these options are either mutually exclusive (e.g. #3, HDTV vs. #4, HD Radio) or redundant (e.g. #5, IP-delivered video; #6, Streaming Media; #27, VOD-via-Broadband; and #33, iTunes Webisodes).

(2) The Ad*VIZR model uses inconsistent logic in its grouping of touchpoints. While the report attempts to sort the 33 touchpoints into seven distinct categories, it is not clear what this breakdown is intended to accomplish, nor how such a breakdown lends itself to the development of useful data. The first

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[31] Ibid., 4, 6, 7.

three categories ("Linear Extensions," "Broadband Enhancements" and "Wireless") seem to imply the touchpoints are being grouped according to distribution platform, a possibility that is undermined by the inclusion of distinct categories for "Other Portals" and "Apple (Ad-Supported)," both of which are accessed via broadband connections. It's not impossible to imagine consistent schemes for organizing these touchpoints: possible criteria could include "distribution platform" (broadcast, cable, satellite, internet, mobile, other), "business model" (broadcast, premium, paid VOD, ad-supported VOD), or "intended function" (generating awareness, increasing viewership, creating revenue, etc). The existing division into seven categories has no clear or consistent governing logic.

   (3) The Ad*VIZR model only acknowledges digital strategies. It's understandable that the Consumer Experience Practice chose to limit the scope of their audit; as the report explains, "these categories only comprise digital extensions that are produced by the various programmers and do not include those that are consumer-generated — a whole other world of evaluation."[32] However, consumer-generated strategies aside, the Ad*VIZR list of touchpoints fails to account for all sorts of other valid modes of non-digital engagement (e.g. purchasing branded apparel, discussing the show with friends and family, and so on). For that matter, it also leaves out at least a few significant types of available digital offerings, including asynchronous games and trivia, basic show-related information such as episode summaries, interactive contests and competitions, and the sale of show-related merchandise.[33]

   (4) The Ad*VIZR model makes all 33 touchpoints equal, instead of weighted. Since the statistics presented in the Ad*VIZR audit are based on the raw number of possible touchpoints a given show has utilized, the implicit claim is that each of these touchpoints is 'equal' in value. (If this is not true, then the statistics have no meaning.) In looking over the list of possible touchpoints, however, it should be obvious that different types of touchpoints — which we might also refer to as extensions or strategies — are not equal: different touchpoints engage the audience in different manners, for different purposes, and with different consequences.

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[32] Ibid., 3.

[33] In fact, despite the inclusion of "e-commerce/show merchandise" in a list of the "Top 10 Touchpoints Expected In 6 Months" (7), e-commerce is not included as an item on the list of 33 possible touchpoints.

If the reader is informed that "the average television show" has almost five touchpoints, but fails to learn whether those touchpoints are "HDTV, satellite radio, voicemail reminders, e-mail reminders and mobile coupons" or "live chat, blogs, mobisodes, message boards and games," it is almost impossible to draw meaningful conclusions or directions from the data. By failing to acknowledge that different touchpoints serve different purposes, address different needs, and are not equally applicable to all programs, the Ad*VIZR model implies – quite wrongly -- that all 33 touchpoints are interchangeable, and leaves the reader with the distinct impression that 'one touchpoint is just as good as another.'

(5) The Ad*VIZR model makes all implementations of a touchpoint equal. Furthermore, when considering the range of existing implementations that can exist for many of the individual touchpoints on this list, it becomes clear that a single type of touchpoint can have a wide range of consequences, meanings and values. Weblogs, for example, encompass both those blogs written by fans (who lack access to "insider" information about the show), actors or writers working on the show (who have access to exclusive information), or even characters from within the show (an innovation which effectively transforms the blog into an extension of the television program). Podcasts can range from three-minute summaries of recent episodes read by anonymous announcers (the content of most FOX-based podcasts) to 30-minute talk shows where audience members are encouraged to submit questions that will be answered by show-runners (such as ABC's podcast for *Lost*). To assume that such diverse touchpoints have equivalent – or even comparable -- consequences for the viewer's experience, simply because they use the same format, is as grave a mistake as assuming that all television programs are equal by merit of appearing on television.

(6) The Ad*VIZR model makes all shows equal. It should go without saying that different types of shows are going to benefit to different degrees from different types of extensions: the evening news is unlikely to benefit from mobile ringtones and wallpapers, just as the newest episode of *CSI* has little use for product coupons distributed to wireless devices. Which extensions are effective, meaningful and relevant will depend on a range of factors, including the composition of the show's target audience and the nature of the show's specific pleasures. While Ad*VIZR does indicate that some types of television — daytime dramas and primetime genre shows, in particular — tend to offer a higher number of touchpoints than the average show, it neither explains why this might be the case nor accounts for the varying relevance of the individual touchpoints to different genres of programming.

Yet what makes the Ad*VIZR audit so tantalizing in its conception – and frustrating in its execution – is the fact that it attempts to account not just for the experience of watching television, but for the vast range of possible experiences that can also be understood as forms of viewer engagement. In this regard, the Ad*VIZR model might have helped television programmers and advertising executives alike rethink the significance of the various touchpoints that proliferate around modern television programming, and in doing so, guided the ongoing discussion about viewer engagement in a more productive direction. Instead, the Ad*VIZR audit produced a series of decontextualized statistics which encourage advertisers to embrace these new forms of content and possibilities for audience interaction, while failing to offer a framework that might help advertisers understand how, where, and why such opportunities should be introduced.

2. Academic Approaches to Engagement

Having thus considered the range of industrial definitions and approaches to conceptualizing engagement, the remainder of this chapter shifts focus to draw upon existing academic literature and research relevant to the task of understanding of how, and why, viewers engage with media texts.

2.1. Three Propositions About Television

Over the past thirty years, Hartley and Fiske have developed three claims about the practice of watching television that prove particularly relevant to this discussion.

(1) "Watching television describes many different possible practices." The increasing industrial emphasis on measuring viewer attentiveness, rather than viewer exposure, results from the growing awareness that "television watching" can describe a wide range of behaviors — a fact that has interested television scholars for more than twenty years.

In 1984, John Hartley proposed that television's appeal was due in no small part to the fact that television content allowed for what he described as "regimes of watching," or varying levels of viewer

attention.[34] And in fact, while the notion of "multitasking" is a relatively recent one, the truth is that television has never required — or guaranteed — a viewer's complete attention. Writing on television's various "modes of reception" in 1987, John Fiske suggested that, in order to be popular as a medium,

> television *must* be capable of being watched with different modes of attention. Viewers may watch television as a primary activity when they are "glued to the screen"; they may… reluctantly give it second place in their attention while they do something else; or they may have it on as background while they read the paper, converse, or do homework; it gains their full attention only when an item makes a strong and successful bid for their interest.[35]

This assessment, which was true twenty years ago, provides an even more accurate description of television watching today, where a viewer's attention will often be divided not only between multiple tasks, such as cooking and cleaning, but between multiple media sources, such as newspapers, websites, and online conversations. The practice of television watching can encompass passive monitoring, rapt immersion, and everything in between.

     (2) "Television audiences have never been passive." The present discussion about engagement is linked with the long-standing argument within television studies that television, despite its popular reputation as a "vast wasteland," has never been a purely "passive" or "mindless" medium.

     John Fiske challenged the assumption that television audiences are passive consumers with his articulation of the "active audience," arguing that while television audiences might be incapable of altering or influencing the content of a television program, the practice of television viewing requires at least two significant forms of audience participation. In particular, Fiske suggests that audiences are required to take an active role both as (1) individual viewers, reading and interpreting television texts to "construct meanings," rather than simply receiving a single predefined meaning, and (2) social viewers, discussing television texts with friends and colleagues to find shared meanings and cultural significance. As Fiske observes, this means that, "audiences participate in the meanings of the program in a way that the Hollywood

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[34] Quoted in Fiske, J. *Television Culture.* 1987, 73.

[35] Ibid. *Television Culture.* 73-74. "Modes of Reception" also includes a more detailed review of literature on this topic, indicating the most relevant research that existed as of 1987.

moguls can neither foresee nor control."[36]

As I'll indicate throughout the next chapter, media scholars have also produced a significant body of work on television fandom and fan practices, illustrating a number of extremely active forms of audience engagement with television properties and texts — and while the activities and habits of these viewers have often been written off, dismissed and marginalized as 'obsessive,' they offer a great deal of insight into the emerging practices of mainstream media consumers.

(3) "The practice of television watching extends well beyond the television screen." As the examples of modern engagement opportunities earlier in this chapter reveal, audience involvement with television properties is not confined to the television screen, or the individual episodes that make up a television series. However, while television's various extensions are now becoming more visible, and more significant in relation to the television shows that prompt them, television scholars have been focused on the audience's "larger" experience of television for quite some time.

As transmedia extensions and user-generated content become increasingly common components in the modern television franchise, Fiske's work on intertextuality provides an excellent initial framework for thinking about the larger question of how audiences engage with, and interpret, the content of television programs and texts. According to Fiske, "the theory of intertextuality proposes that any one text is necessarily read in relationship to others and that a range of textual knowledges is brought to bear upon it."[37] In order to account for the impact of these other "textual knowledges" on the viewer's "reading" of a television text, Fiske said, it would be helpful to develop an expanded set of terms describing television's various texts, and to this end, he proposed three distinct "levels" of television textuality:

(1) *Primary* television texts, a term which refers to "the shows themselves";

(2) *Secondary* texts, a term which describes the various texts that proliferate "around" the show, including reviews, gossip, fan magazines, advertisements and promotional materials; and

(3) *Tertiary* texts, a term that refers to viewer-generated discussion, or "the readings that people

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[36] Ibid. *Television Culture.* 79.

[37] Ibid. *Television Culture.* 108.

make of television, [as well as] the talk and gossip they produce."[38]

Building upon this framework, Fiske then proposed two "dimensions" of intertextuality: (1) horizontal intertextuality, which he described as the connections between "primary texts that are more or less explicitly linked, usually along the axes of genre, character or content," and vertical intertextuality, which he used to describe the connections between a primary television text and the secondary and tertiary texts that proliferate around it.[39]

In the past several years, however, several media scholars have re-evaluated and revised Fiske's intertextual model to better reflect the patterns of media consumption emerging in the post-broadcast era of television. In particular, John Caldwell has suggested that the distinction between the textual levels is breaking down, as the television industry begins to tap these secondary and tertiary forms, repurposing them as additional "primary" content to satisfy the audience's growing demand for related content.[40]

While Fiske's model of intertextuality will be re-considered in Chapter 3, its guiding principle – that the proliferation of "related" texts around television programs is an important process, and not only supplements, but actually transforms the nature and meaning of television texts by influencing their possible readings – remains central to the present objective of rethinking the nature, and scope, of television's modern text.

2.2. Alternate Models of Audience Engagement

There have been at least two significant attempts to improve on the existing models for understanding and evaluating the television audience, which I want to review here, both to indicate what these models did well, and to indicate what still remains to be done. The two models are "consumer expressions" and "connectedness."

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[38] Ibid. *Television Culture.* 85.

[39] Ibid. *Television Culture.* 109, 17.

[40] Caldwell, J. "Critical Industrial Practice: Branding, Repurposing, and the Migratory Patterns of Industrial Texts," *Television & New Media* 7.2 (2006): 103.

Both of these models address the same fundamental problem: that the existing systems for measuring television audiences, based on the idea of "reach" and "impressions," do not tell us anything significant about the nature of modern media consumption. They simply gauge a viewer's "opportunity to see" an advertising message that has been broadcast, rather than telling us about the "nature" of the viewer's response to, or interaction with, the content being consumed. Both of these studies, then, aim to provide a richer qualitative framework for understanding media consumption.

While each of these approaches has its flaws, they also represent a significant advance in thinking about media consumption as a meaningful, personal experience. Before attempting to set out a new framework, then, it would benefit us to consider these existing proposals, and determine what each might contribute to our understanding of the modern television audience.

2.2.1. The "Consumer Expressions" Model

The first model, which shifts from the traditional advertising metric of "viewer impressions" to a new system of "consumer expressions" was developed as the result of a collaboration in 2002 between researchers from Initiative Media and MIT's Program in Comparative Media Studies. Citing the need for a new system of audience measurement that better reflected the conditions of "a [new] mediascape in which consumers experience and interact with content and advertising in new and multi-layered ways,"[41] the project's authors suggested the development of a metric which would evolve the traditional model of impressions to incorporate several new layers of quantitative and qualitative data. In their initial proposal, the research team suggested that by layering explicit qualitative information (such as the media environment, the viewer's involvement and attentiveness, and the nature of the content itself[42]) on top of a quantitative foundation (accounting for existing metrics such as attention, time spent, and satisfaction) the "expression"

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[41] Koerner, *et al.* "Pathways to Measuring Consumer Behavior in an Age of Media Convergence." 8

[42] The specific list of quantitative and qualitative measures was longer, and suggested a model that would account for: the (1) creative unit; (2) media environment; (3) viewer's involvement; (4) attention; (5) message communication values; and (6) targeting affinity. For a more detailed explanation of what these measures describe, see Ibid. 22-24

would "convey the ability of a media vehicle to deliver an actual impression and have the opportunity to elicit an enhanced engagement, perception, recognition, or response."[43]

A year after presenting their proposal, the research team published a new report elaborating on possible methods for gathering and interpreting data about expressions, illustrated with the results of an initial field test designed to measure audience engagement with both the content and advertising of FOX's *American Idol*. While the research design incorporated both quantitative and qualitative approaches, the research drew upon a relatively small pool of research subjects, and functioned more as an initial proof-of-concept than a full-fledged implementation of the consumer expressions model.

According to the researchers, the *American Idol* initiative was designed "to provide insights into the types of relations consumers develop with content across multiple media venues *and* the impact those relationships have on awareness, perception, and purchase intent of advertised goods."[44] Of particular interest, however, were the report's findings on the impact of "social viewing," which seemed to result in individual viewers who were "more highly engaged in the program, more attentive to the entire show while it airs, more likely to visit show-related websites and more inclined to seek out ancillary products and content related to the primary show."[45]

2.2.2. The "Connectedness" Model

A second useful model for thinking about the nature and intensity of the relationship between audiences and television programs surfaced in 1999, when marketing professors Cristel Russell and Christopher Puto proposed the development of a "connectedness scale." In their initial formulation, Russell and Puto defined audience connectedness as "an intense relationship between audience and television program that extends *beyond* the television watching experience into individuals' personal and social lives."[46]

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[43] Ibid.16

[44] Koerner*, et al.* "Walking the Path: Exploring the Drivers of Expression." 6

[45] Ibid.16

[46] Russell, C A and C P Puto. "Rethinking Television Audience Measures: An Exploration into the Construct of Audience Connectedness," *Marketing Letters* 10.4 (1999): 397. Original emphasis.

In their earliest formulations, Russell and Puto proposed that audience connectedness could be used to predict how different media consumers would "use" the media they consume. Their initial inquiries suggested that high levels of connectedness would manifest themselves in specific behavioral patterns, including "self-definition" (in forms ranging from "the constructing of key life roles [and] the modeling of behaviors" to "the validation of one's lifestyle"); "creative engagement" (e.g. the production of fan fiction); "socialization" (using the show as a frequent basis for social interaction); "ritualization" (organizing and maintaining specific social functions of viewing conditions to make consumption more enjoyable); and the purchase of show-related "paraphernalia."[47]

In 2004, Russell, Norman and Heckler published a formal proposal for the development and validation of a "connectedness scale." In their proposal, they were careful to differentiate between "connectedness", which "captures a show's *extended* contribution to its viewers' self-definition,"[48], and three related but distinct constructs: *attitude*, which describes a viewer's "degree of favor or disfavor" toward a television show; *involvement*, which describes the viewer's mental state during the viewing experience; and *overall television viewing*, a metric of "time spent" that is often used to indicate an individual viewer's overall affinity for television.

Russell, Norman and Heckler's research led them to conclude that the relationships which viewers form with television content can be understood in terms of six overarching dimensions, which they described as follows:

(1) **ESCAPE:** The cathartic element that connects a viewer to a program; immersion to forget problems.

(2) **FASHION:** The extent to which a viewer is influenced by the characters' appearance.

(3) **IMITATION:** The inclination to imitate the characters' behavior or speech patterns.

(4) **MODELING:** The degree to which individuals relate their lives to the lives of characters

(5) **ASPIRATION:** Aspiring to actually be on the show or meet the characters.

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[47] Ibid.: 398-400. The authors do an excellent job of establishing the context for their research, providing a thorough review of existing literature and academic work describing how audiences use and relate to the media they consume. Rather than duplicating their efforts here, I refer interested readers to the original work.

[48] Ibid.: 405. Original emphasis.

(6) **PARAPHERNALIA:** The degree to which people collect items to bring the show into their real world.

Based on the results of their initial data gathering, Russell, Puto and Norman asserted that higher levels of viewer connectedness could be correlated with several desirable patterns of behavior. In particular, they proposed that as connectedness increased, the following statements would also be true:

1) "Memory for product placements improves."
2) "The ability to imagine the characters as consumers of real products/brands also increases."
3) "So will:

    a) the frequency of show-related social interaction with others,
    b) the relationships within the community of co-viewers,
    c) the size of the viewer's social network of co-consumers."[49]

Now, there are obviously some problems inherent to each of these models — as, indeed, there will be with any attempt to develop a new model for understanding a complex system of behavior, relationships and interactions. Even so, both the consumer expressions and connectedness models suffer from the same fundamental weakness: they are too divided in their focus. Simply describing the range of possible relationships between media consumers and media content is difficult enough, yet both of these frameworks not only attempt this task, but at the same time endeavor to justify their work by appealing to the needs of advertisers.

Despite their shared flaw, however, both conceptual models represent important and valuable steps toward understanding viewer engagement with television. Most importantly, both of these systems embrace a more expansive definition of television-watching and media consumption. These systems recognize, and try to account for, the various ways viewers relate to the media content they consume: how they use it, how they apply it, how they are shaped by it, how they interact with it, how it influences their interactions with others, and so on.

The "consumer expressions" framework received more attention within the industry, appearing — along with many other possible models for measuring engagement — in the first volume of an ongoing ARF

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[49] Russell, C A*, et al*. "The Consumption of Television Programming: Development and Validation of the Connectedness Scale," *Journal of Consumer Research* 31 (2004): 156.

report[50]. This means that the language and ideas presented within the expressions model, at least in principle, are slowly gaining traction with programmers and advertisers, and might provide a foundation for future discussion about the various forms that media consumption can take.

The "connectedness" framework, on the other hand, does not appear to have much following among television executives, which is a shame, because — putting aside the possible flaws in the model's methodological execution, and the specific implementation its authors propose for a "connectedness scale," the work on connectedness seems to provide the richest, most specific framework to date – at least in quantifiable, behavioral terms – for thinking about the various types of investments and relationships that television viewers form with their favorite programs.

As each of these models suggest, it is time to move away from thinking about television audiences through a simplistic binary of "watching" versus "not watching," and toward a model that offers a more detailed description as to the qualities and desires that define a viewer's overall engagement with, or investment in, television programming.

The "consumer expressions" and "audience connectedness" models, at least in principle, are a step in the right direction, since both emphasize the importance of understanding the experiences that media consumers have, the pleasures that compel them to deepen their relationships, and argue for the development of a model which factor these qualitative details into a more layered assessment that also accounts for basic quantitative metrics such as "attention, time spent, and satisfaction."[51] But even Initiative has not taken significant [visible] steps in this direction: their subsequent work, as seen in the Ad*VIZR New Media Audit, focuses less on understanding specific qualities of the viewer's experience than listing and quantifying the industry's current efforts to create cross-platform engagement and the perception of "added value."

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[50] Plummer, J, *et al.*, <u>Measures of Engagement</u> (Advertising Research Foundation, 2006), 32-33.

[51] Koerner, *et al.* "Pathways to Measuring Consumer Behavior in an Age of Media Convergence." 22

3. A New Definition of Engagement

Having reviewed the range of existing industrial approaches to conceptualizing engagement, as well as several relevant academic projects, and having indicated the collective failure of these efforts to provide a rich and functional model for understanding the meaning and significance of viewer engagement, the subsequent chapters of this thesis will shift focus to propose a new conceptual model for thinking about television engagement as a process that takes place across a range of platforms, spaces and related texts. Before moving forward, however, it is necessary to establish a new definition of engagement that reflects the aims of this project. Thus, the model of engagement articulated in this thesis is based upon the following definition:

A viewer's engagement with a given media, content or advertising brand ("object") can be defined as an overall measure describing both the depth and the nature of an individual's specific investments in the object. Yet, since engagement can take a range of different forms, and simultaneously reflect and serve a number of different needs and desires, there is no simple formula or scale for conducting this measure, nor a single "type" of engagement that describes the range of possible investments (financial, emotional, psychological, social, intellectual, etc) that a viewer can make in a media object.

Accordingly, a viewer's overall engagement with an object can be expressed as the sum total of the viewer's behaviors, attitudes and desires in relation to the object, including:

- *Consumption* of object-related content and products
- *Participation* in object-related activities and interactions
- *Identification* with aspects of the object, both to self and others
- *Motivations* (or desires) for each of the above.

Working from this conceptual foundation, the next two chapters of this thesis require a movement away from the more traditional and insufficient behavioral and attitudinal metrics described in this chapter. The transition from 'television' to 'content' described in the introduction requires a new approach to thinking about the nature and significance of engagement.

Thus, rather than continuing along the paths described in this chapter and seeking out a model for quantifying engagement, it is more productive to focus our efforts on a new set of tasks: understanding how the cultural logic of television is changing, and understanding how the traditional definition of 'television' is expanding to describe a form of content that spreads itself across multiple media technologies and platforms

according to its needs, encompasses a range of content offerings, products and activities, and explores the new business models and opportunities that become possible as the practice of engaging with television shifts from a process of passive content consumption to more active forms of participation and interaction.

CHAPTER 2

The Expanded Television Text

As the popular conception of television expands to describe not only the practice of watching programs on a television set, but also to accommodate the entire range of behaviors, attitudes and practices that determine and reflect both the depth and nature of a viewer's personal investment in a television program, the meaning of "audience engagement" must expand as well. Simultaneously, as Caldwell has suggested, the rapid proliferation of new opportunities and possibilities for viewer engagement with television programming reflects the television industry's growing emphasis on "keeping viewer-users engaged long after a series episode has aired."[1] Yet as the previous chapter has illustrated, the most recent attempts to define and understand viewer engagement have proposed that these new concepts and practices can still be described and measured in more traditional terms, and through the accumulation and interpretation of behavioral and attitudinal data.

If these attempts to formulate a working model that 'explains' engagement have been unsuccessful, I will argue, it is because they are based on the wrong question. Rather than continuing to formalize engagement with models that reduce the audience's complex behaviors and context-specific attitudes into oversimplified, over-generalized and decontextualized algorithmic assumptions, researchers who wish to understand how engagement works should be looking at specific sites of engagement. As Caldwell warned, the development of various commercial and promotional extensions around modern television programs "requires greatly expanding [our] notion of what a TV text is."[2]

This chapter aims to address that requirement by introducing and elaborating an initial framework of categories that describe the wide range of products, features, activities and opportunities that are beginning to emerge as components of 'the new television text.' These components reposition television as an engagement medium by providing new opportunities for the viewer to participate both with and around the television text in meaningful ways. Caldwell has already proposed that the modern industrial practices of

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[1] Caldwell. 51.
[2] Ibid.

repackaging and repurposing content for coordinated distribution across multiple platforms have transformed Fiske's three-tier model of television textuality, as once-inferior secondary (show-related) and tertiary (socially-produced) texts migrate toward primary textual status through a process of industrial appropriation and redistribution.

The framework articulated in this chapter goes even farther, differentiating between and considering the relative impact of more than a dozen forms of program-related television extensions, and proposing that all of these components together constitute the expanded television text with which viewers now engage.

Notes on Methodology

While the various engagement metrics and models described in the previous chapter limit their focus to audience attitudes, emotions and behaviors in strict relation to the experience of viewing television content, a more complete model of engagement needs to account for the fact that television programs are now produced and marketed not as self-contained texts, but as the foundation of larger networks of related products, content extensions, activities, and spaces. If engagement is understood as a process that does not happen exclusively during the viewing experience, but instead as a larger conceptual process encompassing a consumer's overall attitude and pattern of interaction with a program's "brand," a functional model of engagement must account for the entire range of opportunities that allow these acts of consumption and interaction.

Clarification of Intent. The most significant critiques of the *Ad*VIZR New Media Audit* in the previous chapter focused on the over-simplistic construction of the system not as a framework for understanding, but as a decontextualized quantitative metric for determining which touchpoints are most effective in generating engagement. While the framework described in this chapter still proposes a system of touchpoints and categories, it is emphatically not intended to provide quantitative conclusions. Instead, heeding the MPA's warning, this framework is not intended to generate "simple rankings [which] may be misleading" or formulaic algorithms that can be applied to determine the most effective opportunities for engagement, but to help illustrate and organize the wider range of approaches that have been used to create engagement, and the sites where engagement takes place.

Deframed From Technology & Platform. The initial proposal for the "consumer expressions" model warned that as media producers experiment with new types of content, new channels of distribution, and new business models, patterns of consumption will continue to change frequently. As such, its authors warned, any current research exploring audience behavior is "apt to be most valuable if deframed independently from any specific technology or media configuration."[3] It is particularly frustrating, then, that in their subsequent research efforts, as embodied by the *Ad*VIZR New Media Audit*, its authors failed to heed their own warning, and organized research around the specific technological platforms being used. Grouping television's various touchpoints by distribution platform (broadcast, broadband, wireless, etc) poses two significant problems: not only does it deny the flexibility to account for the new channels of media consumption that will inevitably emerge, it also fails to offer insight into any question beyond which platforms last year's corporate budgets were allocated to.

Definition of Touchpoint. To that end, rather than grouping touchpoints according to distribution platform, the following categories organize them by the more enduring characteristic of value propositions: that is, by describing what kinds of content and opportunities these touchpoints extend to the viewer.[4] In this context, the word 'touchpoint' is used as something of a catch-all, describing any content, activity, or strategic offering that allows the media consumer to engage with a television 'brand' in any manner other than watching the core program content through real-time or time-shifted (DVR) viewing.

As such, the categories proposed in this chapter represent an initial (if not exhaustive) framework for conceptualizing and describing the network of possible components that form the expanded television text.

Restricted to Industry-Initiated Activities. Like the *Ad*VIZR New Media Audit*, this discussion's scope is restricted to those touchpoints that are consciously deployed by the television industry, and does not attempt to address the expansive 'unauthorized' activities of fans. At the same time, it is important to

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[3] Koerner*, et al.* "Pathways to Measuring Consumer Behavior in an Age of Media Convergence." 6

[4] To be fair, as new media channels and practices emerge, these descriptive categories will probably expand as well; even so, I believe they provide more insight into the nature of audience engagement than the existing organizational systems.

acknowledge that as user-generated content becomes more prominent, many companies are in the process of re-evaluating how to respond to fan-initiated engagement. Throughout the next two chapters, wherever it is appropriate, I will attempt to contextualize the current industry-driven efforts in a larger framework of audience and fan-initiated activities and precedents.

Restricted to Primetime Adult Fiction. While each genre of programming attracts different audiences, and necessitates different approaches to engagement, the majority of this thesis is restricted to strategies and extensions designed to generate audience engagement with primetime, plot-driven programming. Furthermore, the examples and arguments that follow focus almost exclusively on American domestic programming. While a great deal of innovation is taking place in other countries – particularly at the BBC, which has a mandate to create interactive components, where appropriate, for every program on the network – this discussion will restrict itself to examples from American television.

Touchpoints as Advertising. All touchpoints can be considered promotional strategies, insofar as all of these touchpoints examples described in this chapter – both free and monetized – serve to build awareness for the show or franchise being extended. While this is true, such touchpoints still cannot be dismissed as "mere advertising," for to do so is to misunderstand the way in which audiences now consume and interact with content.

As Caldwell has pointed out, the existence (and increasing significance and integration) of these various extensions require an expanded notion of what the modern TV text 'is' — which means that all of these extensions, taken together with the show that serves as their foundation, become part of a larger experience or brand that constitutes the new television text. And, as Meehan has noted, all of these extensions and strategies are at once product and promotion for all of the other components within their intertextual network.[5]

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[5] Meehan, E R. ""Holy Commodity Fetish, Batman!": The Political Economy of a Commercial Intertext." eds. Pearson and Uricchio. 1991.

Finally, while the discussion in this chapter will give some consideration to the potential appeal that each touchpoint type might hold for media consumers, it is intended primarily to set out a framework for use in the following chapter, which explores the various ways in which consumers use these touchpoints to propose several possible 'modes' of engagement.

1. Formal Program Qualities

Before considering the various touchpoints used to expand the modern television text, it is important to acknowledge that certain textual qualities can, in and of themselves, encourage more active forms of audience engagement with a television program.

The characteristics of the core text determine how audiences can, and are likely to, engage with the property. Serials and daytime shows foster devotion. Both Jason Mittell and Steven Johnson have addressed the satisfactions and demands of narrative complexity in modern television, and existing research suggests that audiences who follow shows with continuous narratives, well-developed characters and detailed narratives tend to make deeper intellectual and emotional investments that the audiences of less complex and demanding programming. As Mittell has pointed out, "audiences tend to embrace complex programs in much more passionate and committed terms than most conventional television."[6]

Furthermore, as Johnson has explained, in the past 20-30 years, the dominant logic of television programming has shifted from its traditional ideology – described by NBC Executive Paul Klein in the 1970s as the "Least Objectionable Programming" (LOP) model, toward what could be described as the "Most Repeatable Programming" (MRP) model, as networks place an increasing emphasis on content that engages viewers by holding their attention and interest to the highest degree possible. As Johnson explains, the ultimate goal of programming has shifted from "capturing an audience's attention once and [instead focuses on]… *keeping* their attention through repeat viewings"[7] — and, for that matter, through advertisements.

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[6] Mittell, J. "Narrative Complexity in Contemporary American Television," *The Velvet Light Trap*. 58 (2006): 32.
[7] Johnson, S. *Everything Bad Is Good For You: How Today's Popular Culture Is Actually Making Us Smarter.* 2005, 159.

It is also important to recognize that the properties of the a television program often suggest the most appropriate engagement strategies and touchpoints to develop, since the most effective touchpoints generally work to enhance the intrinsic pleasures that draw viewers to the show.

2. Expanded Access

Of the 33 touchpoints described in the *Ad*VIZR New Media Audit*, almost one-third fall into a single touchpoint category that I describe as 'expanded access.'[8] As the name implies, expanded access touchpoints do not provide new or original show-related content, but instead provide additional points of access to the show's core content (i.e., full-length episodes) through a range of distribution platforms. Expanded access touchpoints empower media consumers to access content whenever and wherever they want, through whatever device or medium is available. This 'anytime, anywhere' approach to content distribution can be seen as a direct response to the growing threats posed by commercial time-shifting (e.g. TiVo) and location-shifting (e.g. Slingbox) appliances.

DVD. At present, the most ubiquitous form of extended access is the DVD boxed set. While selected television episodes have been available for purchase on video since at least the 1980s, it was not until 2000 – when FOX released the entire first season of cult hit *The X-Files* on DVD – that consumers were given the option to purchase an entire television series.[9] In the past few years, TV-on-DVD has exploded. Not only has it become standard practice for new television programs to be made available on DVD a few months after the end of each season, but consumers are now gaining access to vast back-catalogs of older programming as well[10].

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[8] Of the 33 touchpoints listed in the *Ad*VIZR New Media Audit*, nine describe methods for accessing the core content of the program: (3) high definition television broadcasts; (6) IP-delivered video; (8) streaming media; (20) mobisodes; (25) MSO FVOD channel distribution; (26) cable walled garden distribution; (27) video on demand distributed via broadband; (32) iTunes Video; and (33) iTunes Webisodes. While I understand that mobisodes and webisodes (as the terms are most often used) tend to describe original short-form content, no distinction is made on the Ad*VIZR list to account for this difference.

[9] Whittington-Hill, L. "The idiot box: not just for idiots." *This Magazine*. May 2007.

[10] The rise of television programming on DVD has had a profound impact on almost every aspect of television viewing and production. Interested readers are encouraged to read (Kompare, D. "Publishing Flow: DVD Box Sets and the Reconception of Television," *Television & New Media* 7.4 (2006).).

The Internet. It is only in the past two years, however, that each of the major broadcast networks has taken steps to make some or all of their current programming available on-demand through the Internet, a trend that accelerated in October 2005 when Apple struck a deal to begin selling select ABC programs the day after they appeared on air. Since then, network efforts to make programming available online have fallen into two categories: free, ad-supported streaming video (most often through the network's official website), and paid video downloads (through services such as Apple's iTunes Video Store, Microsoft's XBOX Live, and Amazon's Unbox).

Mobile Devices. In the two years since Apple began selling television content through iTunes, it has also become increasingly common for media consumers to carry and view television content on mobile devices such as the Apple iPod and the Sony Playstation Portable. In the past twelve months, American cellular service providers have also rolled out both on-demand and live television programming as a premium service for wireless subscribers; whether the practice of watching television on a cell phone becomes mainstream remains to be seen.

In all of these cases, expanded access touchpoints enable new relationships between television programs and viewers, and frame engagement with content as an ongoing process that occurs across multiple platforms and channels. Letting consumers access content whenever, wherever, and however they want positions television content as a reliable part of their lives, and, at the same time, enables viewers to share their favorite content with others, helping position media content as the basis for social interactions.

3. Repackaged Content

The most common form of engagement touchpoint, without question, consists of what can be described as "repackaged content." In this context, repackaged content refers to any content offering that manipulates, re-organizes, excerpts, replicates, reuses, repurposes or adapts a show's core content (i.e. the original televised episodes), thus generating new content through variations of pre-existing content.

Repackaged content provides viewers with perpetual access to information that was first provided during episodes of the broadcast program. Repackaging often makes this content more useful or appealing by reconfiguring and reorganizing it, but does not supplement it with new information or content. Common examples of repackaged (or repurposed) informational extensions include episode guides, character

biographies and plot summaries, all of which have become standard fare on a program's promotional micro-site.

The strategy of compiling and repurposing show-related information has been in place since well before mainstream television audiences began using the Internet. Most often, these pre-network extensions took the form of official and unofficial "episode guides," detailing the significant narrative events from each episode of a series, gathering together significant biographical details about major characters, and so on.   As Matt Hills has pointed out, the creation and publication of such guides has been most common in relation to detail-rich "cult shows," as well as serialized programs that often refer to events and interactions from previous episodes.[11] Before the emergence of the Internet as a promotional space for television programming, most examples of repackaged content were developed and sold as niche-specific commodities, designed to help dedicated fans navigate and organize the vast amount of trivial and non-trivial information existing around a given series.

However, as more television programs shift to adopt more complex narrative structures and multi-episode narrative arcs, repackaged content is being designed to appeal to mainstream audiences. As television narratives become less redundant in their writing and construction, repackaged content touchpoints help ensure that even television's most complex and serialized programming remains accessible (or at least comprehensible) to new and occasional viewers.   Without access to these touchpoints, less dedicated viewers would lack the narrative information and character knowledge that such shows depend upon. This means that repackaged informational extensions function largely as a method of keeping content accessible to "less engaged" viewers, allowing them to "catch themselves up," figure out what they missed, or — in the case of more complex shows — review what they saw.

This is not to say that repackaged content touchpoints can't be developed to appeal to a show's more devoted viewers. The evolution of media-rich technologies such as Flash and QuickTime have enabled programmers to develop more complex and meaningful interfaces to help engaged viewers navigate and "interact" with vast amounts of repackaged and reorganized information. For example, while the website for *Law & Order* has a dedicated episode guide, it also includes a "Case Histories" section that allows viewers to

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[11] Hills, M. "Cult TV, Quality and the Role of the Episode/Programme Guide." eds. Hammond and Mazdon. 2005.

navigate detailed timelines that summarize important events from the series, and pull up individual "files" on each of the show's characters for information on their personal histories, relationships, and so on.

In *Hamlet on the Holodeck*, Janet Murray anticipated these content-reconfiguring resources as one inevitable result of television-Internet convergence, predicting that digital archives of television content, "unlike the same content stored on a VCR tape, would be searchable by content. Viewers could call up individual segments of past episodes or view a single continuous story thread that was originally woven into several episodes."[12]

Television fans have been producing their own unofficial informational extensions for years, in some cases producing resources so comprehensive that the show's creators and writers admit to using them to avoid narrative inconsistencies.[13] In the past twelve months, however, the industry's attitude toward such efforts has shifted from one of tolerance to one of encouragement; the official websites for many network programs now implore viewers to write, compile and organize show-related information using wikis and other collaborative tools — an approach to generating engagement described later in this chapter as "productive activities" (5.3).

4. Ancillary Content

The third distinct group of engagement touchpoints consists of what is often referred to as "ancillary content." In this context, I am using the term ancillary to describe any and all content created or made available to audiences that provide content or information beyond that which was presented in the television episodes themselves[14]. This definition emphasizes the critical difference between ancillary content and

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[12] Murray, J H. *Hamlet on the Holodeck.* 1997, 256.

[13] One of the most famous of these fan-created resources is The Lurker's Guide to Babylon 5, Available: http://www.midwinter.com/lurk., which is still being updated today, almost ten years after the show went off the air. For a detailed discussion examining the *Lurker's Guide* in contrast to *Babylon 5*'s official episode guide, see Wexelblat, A. "An Auteur in the Age of the Internet: JMS, Babylon 5, and the Net." eds. Jenkins, McPherson and Shattuc. 2002..

[14] I should also note that, for the purposes of developing this framework, I am using also restrictive definition of content. In this context, I am taking content to mean static rather than interactive or responsive content. While some discussions would describe games and other activities developed around a television program as ancillary content, the ability to interact with these products places them in a different category, called *experiential activities*. However, in some cases, games are also used to introduce new, original narrative material, making them something of a hybrid. See Section 6.2 (Experiential Activities) later in this chapter for a more thorough discussion of these touchpoints.

repackaged content*:* repackaged content reorganizes and recontextualizes the core content of a television series, but offers nothing new, while ancillary content introduces new material and/or information which supplements, extends or expands the consumer's overall knowledge.

Ancillary content might also be understood as a revision or further elaboration of what Fiske described as "secondary texts," an all-encompassing category which he used to describe:

> writing about television in a wide variety of forms – journalistic criticism, gossip about the stars, specialist magazines for fans (particularly of soap opera), "novelizations" of the television scripts (e.g. ones of *Dr Who*, or *The A-Team*), advertisements, posters, and television promos.[15]

While this general relationship still applies – these texts, at least for the time being, are generally understood to be less important than the "primary text" of the program itself – there is good reason to further articulate and differentiate between the various kinds of content that fall under Fiske's larger heading of secondary texts. In auditing the range of ancillary content that now proliferates around television programming, at least three distinct categories of content emerge, each with their own focus and appeal. These categories are (1) textual extensions, (2) relevant information, and (3) extratextual information.

4.1. Textual Extensions

"Textual extensions" — as their name implies — extend the core text itself, providing further narrative developments and plots, and providing interested viewers with additional access to the world and/or characters of the television program.[16] Within this category, however, it is useful to differentiate between two distinct approaches to textual extension: narrative extensions and diegetic extensions.

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[15] Fiske. 85.

[16] While we might also describe these as explicit and intentional forms of intertextuality, I find it useful to reserve that word for a show's implicit relationship to other texts, in the form of allusions, references, etc. See Chapter 3, Section 3.2 (Mastering Textual Relationships) for further clarification as to the use of inter- and intratextuality in this thesis.

4.1.1. Narrative Extensions

Narrative extensions provide media consumers with additional narrative content that complements or supplements a show's narrative, relating new stories that are not depicted in the core narrative of the television series. At the most basic level, narrative extension can be used to describe any content that returns to the characters, settings, or events from a previous narrative. As such, the simplest possible examples of narrative extension are prequels and sequels. Narrative extensions can also be used as the basis for new, self-sustaining narratives, as in the case of Joss Whedon's *Angel* (1999), a spin-off series that shifted its focus and setting to feature several supporting characters from its' "parent" show, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* (1997), but often introduced cross-program narratives that were introduced in one series and resolved in the other.

More often, narrative extensions have taken the form of "licensed" stories. Even in television's earliest days, shows such as *Dragnet* (1951) developed their narrative "brand" by releasing licensed tie-in stories and episode novelizations, written on contract by authors with no formal involvement in the television series. Much like the individual episodes of *Dragnet*, however, these novels generally offered readers stand-alone stories, rather than some connection to a larger narrative arc.[17]

By the 1970's, "cult" shows such as *Star Trek* (1966) were exploring a more integrated approach to textual extension, publishing novels that included references to characters, events and settings that appeared in television episodes, and helped establish the Star Trek universe as a persistent and evolving setting, complete with its own historical progression.

The science-fiction drama *Babylon 5* (1994) demonstrated an even tighter level of transmedia integration between the show's core and extended narratives, using novels and comic books to depict events and develop characters who were referenced during the show's television narratives, and to provide richer narrative context for specific events, actions and characters from the series. According to series creator J. Michael Straczynski, who drafted detailed outlines and oversaw production of several *Babylon 5* extensions, almost all of the show's transmedia extensions represent canonical additions to the show's core narrative.[18]

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[17] In his discussion of television's "levels of intertextuality," Fiske considered such spin-offs to be one among many possible types of "secondary texts."

[18] Notorious for the level of authorial control he asserted over his series, Straczynski made public statements regarding a handful of *Babylon 5* extensions that didn't meet his personal standards, writing online that he had received manuscripts in which "the level of

Straczynski's active participation in developing the show's extensions is the exception, not the rule. Until recently, most narrative extensions were viewed primarily as commercial – and not creative – opportunities. As such, licensed extensions were often written without participation or direct input from the show's "official" creators and writers, a practice that could (and did) often result in narrative inconsistencies and contradictions. In the absence of an official statement from a show's creator, fan audiences frequently debate the "canonical status" that should be granted to such extensions. In many cases, consumers ultimately view extensions as creative failures, designed to exploit and profit from viewer investment, rather than as texts created to make important or meaningful contributions to the larger narrative "vision."

In the past decade — and particularly in the last several years — narrative extensions have grown both more common and more diverse in nature. No longer dismissed as secondary licensing opportunities, modern narrative extensions are emerging as a strategic asset in the process of transforming television shows from single-platform properties into elaborate, engagement-inducing transmedia franchises. By developing additional "mini-texts" and narratives around broadcast programs, programmers attempt to create "value-added entertainment." While such extensions can still provide additional sources of revenue, narrative extensions are increasingly being used to expand individual television properties into larger entertainment "brands" that viewers can relate to, share with friends, and so on.

As a result, narrative extensions now take a wide range of forms, and exist across most major media channels. While most popular action and drama shows offer the standard licensed novelizations, a few of the more interesting recent examples include:

• *The Office: The Accountants.* A series of 10 original serialized video shorts (or 'webisodes') starring minor characters from NBC sitcom *The Office,* delivered via podcast at regular intervals during the summer of 2006, and designed to keep viewers talking about the show during the summer hiatus;

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writing is at very best amateurish, on a level somehow below what one would find on the average fan-fiction website." Straczynski, J M. "Re: ATTN JMS - Mongoose Books?"

• *Heroes: The Graphic Novel.* A line of "interactive graphic novels" developed to extend NBC's serialized drama *Heroes*, consisting of short, downloadable comic book narratives that offer expanded plots and additional character development tied to individual episodes of the show, with a compilation of first-season installments slated for commercial release this fall;

• *Ghost Whisperer: The Other Side.* An original online mini-series tied to CBS's supernatural drama *Ghost Whisperer* during the 2006-2007 season introduced new plot arcs, reconsidering the show's themes from the perspective of a new (dead) character that appeared in the show's televised season finale;

• *24:* Several extensions have been developed to extend the narrative of FOX's hit action series *24*, including a series of three graphic novels (one serving as a prequel, set eighteen months before the events of the show's first season), a video game that lets players act out the undepicted narrative events that transpired between the show's second and third seasons, and a possible forthcoming theatrical film.

As some of these examples illustrate, recent narrative extensions work on multiple levels, providing additional nuance and fictional texture for dedicated viewers while simultaneously introducing and elaborating upon significant plot points that help 'deepen' the audience's understanding and appreciation of the television series being extended.[19]

In the past twelve months, a number of older television properties have also shifted to explore narrative extensions as a viable method for reviving and continuing long-cancelled franchises. Two of these are of particular interest, since they suggest the enduring commercial potential for narrative extensions developed around franchises with deeply engaged audiences.

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[19] While there's no single factor to explain the recent popularity of this approach, the most likely catalyst is the transmedia experimentation that surrounded the 2003 release of the second and third films in the *Matrix* franchise, offering a proof-of-concept for how narrative extensions could function as meaningful components of a larger narrative whole. For more, see Ch 3 of *Convergence Culture*.

• *Babylon 5: The Lost Tales.* In July 2007, *Babylon 5* was resurrected on a trial basis, with the release of a new direct-to-DVD movie marking the program's first narrative extension since the series concluded in 1999[20]. Show creator Straczynski has informed the show's still-ardent fan base that if the DVD turns enough profit, he will be given clearance to shoot additional installments – in effect, to revive a narrative that has been off the air for eight years.

• *Buffy the Vampire Slayer: Season 8.* On March 14, 2007, fan-favorite Joss Whedon released the first new episode of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* since the show completed its seven-season broadcast run in May 2003. Rather than returning to television, however, Whedon struck a deal with Dark Horse Comics to resume his original narrative in comic-book form, with the initial intention of writing about 25 issues. The result, which picks up where the program's narrative arc left off in the 2003 series finale, is being referred to as "Season 8," and is reuniting a number of the program's original writers to script and plot the "season-long" sequence of events. The commercial response has been so positive that Whedon has been in talks with Dark Horse to launch official comics reviving his other defunct television projects, *Angel* and *Firefly*, within the next twelve months.

While there is no formulaic approach to how audiences evaluate these texts, existing research into fan behavior and entertainment brands suggests that viewers will evaluate narrative extensions on the basis of how effective the extensions are in capturing the appealing qualities of the core program, and the extent to which the extended narratives are consistent with the "core narrative" developed on the show. As Matt Hills has noted in his work on fan behavior, "fans expect adherence to established tenets, characterisations, and narrative 'back-stories', which production teams thus revise at their peril, disrupting the trust which is placed in the continuity of a detailed narrative world."[21]

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[20] To be fair, *Babylon 5* technically resurfaced in an original movie on the Sci-Fi Network in 2002 (*Babylon 5: Legend of the Rangers*), but most fans dismiss this project – which was intended to launch a new spin-off series of the same name – as an abject failure with little to connect it to the original series.

[21] Hills, M. *Fan Cultures.* 2002, 28.

4.1.2. Diegetic Extensions

Like narrative extensions, diegetic extensions provide the audience with additional insight, information, or narrative content. The crucial difference is one of framing and presentation: while narrative extensions acknowledge themselves as a form of storytelling, and can be understood as "new chapters" adding onto a program's core narrative, diegetic extensions present themselves as "diegetic artifacts" from within the world or narrative of the show. Such extensions may or may not explicitly advance the narrative events of a show, but in all cases, they are designed to give viewers the sensation of "direct interaction" with the show's narrative world and/or characters.

Since diegetic extensions require viewers to pretend they are interacting with objects from within a fictional narrative, this form of extension has most often been developed around "cult" television shows, where dedicated viewers most often demonstrate a desire to immerse themselves within the show's narrative universe.[22]

While diegetic extensions require viewers to "play a role," it is important to distinguish them from two other types of extension that share some common elements: role-playing games and reproductions. Role-playing games have been constructed and sold around many popular cult television shows, providing a series of rules and game mechanics that allow players to imagine and act out their own adventures in the show's narrative space. Reproductions offer viewers the chance to own detailed replicas of objects featured in a show's narrative, and emphasize their status as convincing replicas. Neither role-playing games nor reproductions can be considered diegetic extensions, however, because diegetic extensions represent themselves as "actual" objects from within the show's narrative — and in doing so, challenge the boundaries that separate the viewer's reality from the separate reality of the show.

One of the first significant experiments with developing diegetic extensions for a television series took place in 1990-1991, with the publication of three books related to ABC's genre-defying cult series *Twin Peaks*. While all three volumes presented themselves as artifacts from within the narrative, each book had a different level of connection to the program's central narrative.

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[22] The concept of "immersion" as a specific mode of viewer engagement will be discussed in the next chapter.

The least connected was a faux-travel guide called *Welcome to Twin Peaks: Access Guide to the Town*, a thin volume that offered a wealth of fictional details about the show's setting and major characters, as well as recipes, anecdotes, and other scraps catering to the show's detail-obsessed contingent of fans.

More relevant to the on-screen narrative was a second book, *The Autobiography of Dale Cooper*, which presented itself as a transcript of tape-recorded dictations from one of the show's main characters. Yet, while *The Autobiography* offered its readers extensive character development, however, fans were somewhat divided regarding the book's canonical standing, since the details included in the book had never been referenced in, nor had a visible impact on, the narrative events depicted in the show.

The most integrated of the three books was *The Secret Diary of Laura Palmer*, a manuscript – complete with "missing pages" – that offered readers hands-on access to a hidden diary that had been discovered in the show's on-air narrative, and which the show itself emphasized as an important source of information that might help solve the central mystery. While it is unclear whether the producers decided to write and publish *The Secret Diary* before or after it had appeared as an on-air plot point, the book was a commercial success, briefly rising as high as fifth-place on *The New York Times* bestseller list.[23]

The commercial performance of *The Secret Diary*, relative to the other *Twin Peaks* books suggests that audiences will demonstrate higher interest in *diegetic artifacts* (objects that have explicit significance in the core television narrative) than mere diegetic extensions (objects that do not appear in the core narrative, but are presented as if they exist within the diegetic space of the program).

More recently, diegetic extensions have been developed and marketed in relation to a wide range of popular television programs. After the conclusion of its first season, the creators of FOX's *24* released *24: The House Special Subcommittee's Findings at CTU*, a book which returned to the events of the first season in the form of compiled "transcripts" from a fictional Congressional inquiry.[24] Another recent book, *Oakdale Confidential*, offered fans of *As The World Turns* the chance to read an "anonymous" expose written by one of the show's characters — an expose that appeared as a plot point on the show concurrent with the book's

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[23] Lavery, D. "The Semiotics of Cobbler." *Full of Secrets*, ed. Lavery. 1995.

[24] Cerasini, M and A Alfonsi. "24: The House Special Subcommittee's Findings at CTU."

release in stores. And, like *The Secret Diary of Laura Palmer*, which also appeared as an element in the on-air narrative, *Oakdale Confidential* established itself as a *New York Times* bestseller.[25]

Even more mainstream, however, are the Internet-based digital extensions that have been experimenting with this approach. In 1997, Murray accurately anticipated that convergence-era television websites would move in precisely this direction, away from simple promotional materials, and toward what she described as "an integrated digital archive." Such web sites, she predicted, would transform television's serial dramas into multiplatform "hyperserials" — interactive, non-linear narrative "experiences" that would allow viewers to determine their own level of interaction, providing them with access to:

> virtual artifacts from the fictional world of the series, including not only diaries, photo albums, and telephone messages, but also documents like birth certificates, legal briefs, or divorce papers… [as well as] virtual environments that are extensions of the fictional world.

Murray went on to elaborate on how the hyperserial might offer both new models for transmedia storytelling and new roles for audience members, theorizing that:

> All of these digital artifacts would be available on demand, in between episodes, so that viewers could experience a continuous sense of ongoing lives. A hyperserial might include daily postings of events in the major story line — another fight between feuding characters or a set of phone messages between separated lovers—that would be alluded to in the broadcast segments but detailed only in the on-line material.[26]

In 1998, less than a year later, Murray's prediction proved itself uncannily prescient when the producers of *Dawson's Creek* launched Dawson's Desktop, a promotional website developed to keep viewers engaged with UPN's teen melodrama between broadcast episodes.[27]

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[25] For a more interesting, detailed and thorough discussion of *Oakdale Confidential* as a diegetic extension, see Samuel Ford's work on *As The World Turns* and transmedia storytelling, both on the *Convergence Culture Consortium Weblog* <convergenceculture.org/weblog> and in his thesis (Ford, S, "*As The World Turns* in a Convergence Culture," Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2007.).

[26] See Murray. 255. for an excellent and detailed prediction of how these virtual environments could enhance a viewer's engagement with a show's diegetic space, using the example of hospital drama *ER* as a prototype. In fact, readers interested in the possibilities inherent in diegetic extension are advised to read the entire chapter, entitled "Digital TV and the Emerging Formats of Cyberdrama," which outlines additional possibilities that have not yet been realized.

[27] The logic behind Dawson's Desktop is discussed at length in Jenkins. 116-17.. Also see Crosdale, D. *Dawson's Creek: The Official Companion.* 1999..

Rather than simply providing show-related information like most television-promo websites at the time, Dawson's Desktop presented itself as a diegetic extension, providing visitors with "direct access" to the personal computer of the show's title character. Narrative arcs initiated on the show were continued online in the form of diary entries, private e-mail messages, online conversation transcripts, and so on. Visitors could also follow links to several others sites that offered even more diegetic content, including articles published in the protagonist's school newspaper and interactive tours of on-screen locations.

Citing Dawson's Desktop as one of the best examples of an emerging form that he described as "convergence television," Caldwell has observed that "the most effective Web sites for TV succeed by keeping viewer-users engaged long after a series episode has aired," and identified six distinct online strategies used to do so. Three of these strategies — "characterized proliferations", "narrativized elaborations" and "backstory textuality" — can all be seen as versions of diegetic extension. [28]

As Caldwell explains them, "characterized proliferations" refer to materials that are "written by" or "belong to" characters on the show, such as diaries, IM conversations, chat transcripts, weblogs and e-mail accounts, but do not extend or alter the narrative. "Narrativized elaborations", by contrast, refer to diegetic materials that "allow the narrative arc of the show to 'continue' outside of the show itself," such as postcards from characters who have departed from the show. "Backstory textuality" refers to material that fleshes out character histories and biographies in more detail than a linear television show allows, such as a character's college admissions essay or Christmas shopping list.

Yet, while Caldwell's terms offer useful indications of the specific ends that diegetic extensions can serve, even the provided examples from Dawson's Desktop suggest that it can be difficult to differentiate between the categories that Caldwell proposed: while he offers "a character's Christmas list" as an example of backstory textuality, based on its potential to provide more insight into a character than television episodes allow, this example could just as easily represent a characterized proliferation, in that it has been "written by" the character, or a narrativized elaboration, if an item or marginal note on the list hinted at narrative events taking place "outside of the show itself." With newer examples blurring these distinctions even farther, it

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[28] Caldwell. 51.

seems more productive to simply accept that, as a term, diegetic extensions can encompass several of Caldwell's strategies, and can use these extensions to several different ends.

During the 2006-2007 season, as part of their transition to NBC 2.0, the programming executives at NBC have experimented with diegetic extensions for almost all of their new shows, with mixed results.[29] It is worth noting that the conceptual novelty of diegetic extensions tends to attract extensive media coverage and word-of-mouth attention: at the time of writing, some of the most popular textual extensions available are diegetic in nature, including a series of weblogs written by characters from various NBC programs[30], a video "talk show" (*Evening with Kenneth*) shot after hours by one of the supporting characters on NBC's *30 Rock*[31], and an entire series of mini-telenovela episodes shown in the background during episodes of ABC's *Ugly Betty*.[32]

Thus far, diegetic weblogs have emerged as the most common type of diegetic extension, presumably because they require relatively little investment of time or production resources. In April 2006, an article in *USA Today* reported that diegetic (or 'in-character') weblogs were available for featured shows on all of the major networks, including ABC's *Boston Legal*, NBC's *Medium* and CBS' *NCIS*. According to some producers, diegetic extensions can also have a significant impact on a show's performance; the article implies that online extensions helped boost NBC sitcom *The Office* to its current status as one of the network's biggest comedy hits.

From a viewer's perspective, diegetic extensions can also provide the experience of "direct contact" with a narrative world, which approximates materialized immersion (a development described later in this chapter as 'diagonal' social interactions). As Corey Miller, executive story editor and blogger for *CSI: Miami* explains, "It's nice for shows to have connections with the fans. It makes [viewers] closer and more involved

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[29] For a sense of how badly these extensions can backfire when implemented poorly, see my article on Henry Jenkins' website about *Defamer*, NBC's ill-conceived diegetic extension for *Studio 60 on the Sunset Strip*. (Askwith, I. "When Transmedia Goes Wrong: Studio 60 and Defaker." *henryjenkins.org*. 12 October 2006.)

[30] At the time of writing, NBC's entire assortment of blogs (both real and diegetic) can be accessed at <http://blog.nbc.com/NBC>.

[31] NBC has been promoting *Evening with Kenneth* as new content for the show's second season, but episodes were posted to the *30 Rock* site throughout the first season. View a sample video at < www.nbc.com/30_Rock/video/#mea=70905>.

[32] ABC-UglyBetty, Ugly Betty: Vidas de Fuego, 2006, Available: http://abc.go.com/primetime/uglybetty/vidasdefuego/index.html.

in the product."[33] More specifically, such blogs serve (as Murray predicted) to "deepen the immersive illusion of the story world." By allowing viewers to feel that they are in direct contact with the world, or the characters that appear on a show, diegetic extensions might be seen as offering a sense of materialized immersion. They may also encourage viewers to form strong parasocial relationships with characters, and encourage deeper viewer identification.[34]

While there is no formal system for understanding how audiences evaluate and respond to diegetic texts, existing research on fan behavior and narrative immersion suggest a number of factors that viewers use to evaluate such extensions. As with narrative extensions, the "success" of diegetic extensions requires them to be consistent with the audience's existing understanding and knowledge of a show's narrative. Due to their unusual nature as 'real' fictional objects, it seems likely that audiences will also evaluate diegetic extensions on the basis of how logical and plausible it is for them to exist within the narrative world.

4.2. Relevant Information

"Relevant information" touchpoints are designed to provide viewers with additional textual and intertextual knowledge, offering supplemental details and expanded information that help enhance the viewer's appreciation, understanding, and/or comprehension of a show's core content.

Murray has suggested that by providing individuals with access to vast archives of information, the Internet has led audiences to desire, seek out, and expect "encyclopedic" knowledge about topics that interest them. This expectation that information will always be available has also led audiences to demand more thorough and comprehensive detail about the fictional narrative worlds that interest them. As Murray anticipated, "the capacity to represent enormous quantities of information in digital form translates into an artist's potential to offer a wealth of detail, to represent the world with both scope and particularity."[35] This

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[33] Oldenburg, A. "TV goes to blogs: Shows view extra information as a treat to entice fan loyalty," *USA Today.* 2006. For a more detailed discussion of how (and why) television writers are participating in these diegetic projects, see also Barney, C. "Get inside TV characters' heads through their 'personal' blogs," *The Contra Cost Times.* 2006.

[34] Parasocial relationships are explained later in this chapter (Section 7, Social Interaction). For more about viewer identification, see Chapter 3, Section 5 (The Logic of Identification).

[35] Murray. 84.

capacity has proven particularly useful to the creators of genre programming, such as *Star Trek* and *Babylon 5*, by allowing them to depict detailed, fully realized fictional worlds and cultures.

For more mainstream programming, however, this type of narrative elaboration often proves less compelling. A dedicated *Star Trek* viewer might be interested in knowing more about a new alien race, because experiencing the new and unfamiliar are among the core pleasures of the science-fiction genre, but this is less true for viewers of more mainstream formats, such as medical or criminal procedurals. The narratives of these programs, while fictional, still occur most often in "realistic" settings and familiar locations. Thus, for the viewers of such shows, elaborate detail and texture about the show's narrative world would not only be redundant; unless such information worked to deepen the show's specific narrative pleasures, it would be irrelevant.

As such, many programs offer "relevant" information about an episode's featured content. Crime procedurals often provide details about forensic procedures used, medical mysteries frequently elaborate on an episode's featured disease, and legal dramas often describe the real-life cases and rulings that inspired an episode's narrative. Such extensions are often particularly easy to develop, since a great deal of potential content (e.g. research notes, historical details) often exist on the production level and can be repurposed for audience consumption with minimal effort. With more demanding and detail-oriented shows, relevant information might also be provided to help viewers identify and comprehend the show's intertextual references.

And, in some cases, relevant informational touchpoints help transform television programming into endorsement-based advertising, by providing detailed information on commercial products, services or content featured in the program. This information may range from artist information and track listings for uncredited songs used on air to details indicating where interested viewers can purchase a character's clothing, accessories or furniture. As Russell et al have noted in their discussion of audience connectedness, this means that offering relevant information can also provide television programmers with additional

sources of revenue, since connected viewers often express their attachment to a show, or a show's characters, by adopting a character's brand preferences.[36]

Ultimately, providing consumers with access to relevant information helps to extend and deepen their pleasurable experience of the show. As such, the specific information that a show's extensions offer will (and should) be a function of the format, focus, and style of the show itself.

4.3. Extratextual Information

"Extratextual information" provides viewers with background information and "insider" access; rather than elaborating on the content of the show itself, industrial information positions the television series as an industrial product, and emphasizes the viewer's awareness of the show's creative team and cast as professionals. This category encompasses two more specific types of information: industrial information and celebrity information. Caldwell has suggested that these extratextual extensions frequently function as "mediating texts," helping to shape both the audience's perception of television practitioners and the audience's evaluation of television programs.[37]

4.3.1. Industrial Information

Industrial information is that which concerns the industrial, commercial and technological dimensions of a show's production and development, providing the consumer with a sense of "insider access" and critical insight into the show's construction as a commercial and industrial product. The most common forms of industrial information include behind-the-scenes production featurettes and podcasts, interviews with the show's cast and creators, details about casting decisions and shooting locations, and even reports on the show's ratings and sales.

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[36] The idea of connecting television content with commerce has existed for decades, but grows easier with each passing year thanks to the convergence of television and Internet technologies. For a recent look at the state of these efforts, see Frey, J. "From Bree to Me: Like Prime Time in Your Living Room? Click, and It's in Your Closet or Garage," *The Washington Post.* 2007.

[37] Caldwell. "Critical Industrial Practice: Branding, Repurposing, and the Migratory Patterns of Industrial Texts," 113.

4.3.2. Celebrity Information

Celebrity information, on the other hand, tends to take the form of one-on-one interviews with (or weblogs authored by) cast and crew, and focuses on "humanizing" the show's creative participants (i.e., cast, crew, producers and writers). Paradoxically, touchpoints designed to provide audiences with celebrity information simultaneously emphasize and de-emphasize the importance of the featured celebrities: the very act of being interviewed or asked to write a weblog reinforces the viewer's awareness that these subjects are competent, skilled creative professionals — in short, celebrities — while the interviews and blogs themselves often work to make celebrities seem more accessible and human.

5. Branded Products

The term "branded products" refers to show-related objects that do not function as "content," but which bear the brand identity of a television program. In general, branded products are those items that viewers can collect and own, and which are distinguished from comparable products and items only by their branded affiliation with the show. Branded extensions prominently display the show's brand through the inclusion of such recognizable markers as characters, memorable phrases and identifiable logos. Common examples of branded extensions include both free and inexpensive promotional items, such as downloadable desktop pictures, buddy icons, screensavers, mobile wallpapers and ring-tones, and commodified merchandise, such as apparel, keychains and posters.

Russell and Puto considered a viewer's desire to acquire branded merchandise — which they described as *paraphernalia* — to be a significant dimension of audience connectedness, suggesting that highly connected audience members "demonstrated strong patterns of purchasing and collecting… tapes, T-shirts, books, movies, screensavers, pictures, and any other information about where to find the 'coolest,' 'newest' memorabilia from their favorite show."[38] In additional, both Lancaster and Gwenllian-Jones have suggested that a critical motive driving the consumption of branded merchandise and collectible

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[38] Russell and Puto. "Rethinking Television Audience Measures," 401.

memorabilia may be the desire for immersion. According to Gwenllian-Jones, the practice of acquiring and collecting merchandise:

> may bespeak a compulsion for collecting among fans, but a less pathological explanation is that they function, as I have argued elsewhere, as talismans of fantasy that serve as prompts to the imagination, synecdochically invoking the beloved fictional world.[39]

At present, the branded products developed around television programs serve two important functions from the perspective of the audience. First, as indicated in Russell and Puto's work on connectedness, branded items allow viewers publicly affiliate themselves with, or express their personal commitment to, a specific television series. Second, as Gwenllian-Jones points out, for viewers who have a deep personal investment in a television program, branded products serve as situated reminders of favored content, endowing otherwise common objects with familiar aspects of the television program.

In addition, such branded products can also serve two important industrial functions: first, as Caldwell has suggested, the sale of branded merchandise (which he describes as "merchandising augmentations") provides a source of additional revenue which can help offset a show's production and promotional costs.[40] Second, such items can also function as promotional tools for any and all of the other components that constitute a television series' extended text, since the consumer acts of purchasing or publicly displaying a show's brand also serve as endorsements that can help the show attract new viewers.

Before moving on, I want to isolate a specific subset of materials that fall under the broader heading of branded extensions: collectible merchandise. While it might seem a bit excessive to distinguish collectibles from the more generalized branded extensions described above, it is important to recognize that collectible items — often taking the form of limited-edition trading cards, action figures, statues, models, replicas and so on — have their own special logic and appeal. While invested viewers may collect as much branded merchandise as possible, collectible merchandise is specifically developed and marketed to appeal to highly committed viewers. Even more so than branded merchandise, collectibles allow viewers to express

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[39] Gwenllian-Jones, S. "Virtual Reality and Cult Television." eds. Gwenllian-Jones and Pearson. 2004, 86.

[40] Caldwell. 52.

their personal investment in the show on two levels: through public acts of affiliation and through private acts of consumption.[41]

The first level, which I describe as "public acts of affiliation", refers to the use of collectibles to signal one's appreciation for (and affiliation with) a show through public performance. As Kurt Lancaster observes:

> If a [viewer] wears a Star Trek uniform, it shows how much that person may want to be seen as a crew member of the Enterprise. Or if someone wears a stormtrooper helmet, putting on a rubber latex mask, they may be saying that they embrace the ideals of the Empire's philosophy and lifestyles as promulgated in the Star Wars movies, novels, and comics.[42]

On another level, however, the purchase of collectibles can constitute a (relatively) private act of consumption. Tankel and Murphy have described such acts as practices of "curatorial consumption," a term that Matt Hills has re-articulated as "commodity-completist practices."[43] While Hills does not offer an explicit definition for his term, I find it preferable for its implicit suggestion that collectible merchandise appeals to the consumer's desire for completion, and makes that desire attainable via paid consumption. Nowhere is this strategy more transparent than in the *Pokemon* franchise, which explicitly presents itself as a 'commodity-completist' franchise through its theme song's exhortation that viewers have "Gotta catch 'em all!"

While it is rarely so explicit, this same operating principle seems to drive the development of collectible merchandise around a wide range of television franchises. Under the logic of collectibles, the viewer's willingness to acquire a complete series or set of items is used to signal their degree of commitment to a show. This, in turn, suggests that collecting show-related merchandise and artifacts might indicate a desire to distinguish oneself from other, 'less' invested fans.

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[41] I say this with full awareness that consumption can also be, and often is, a public and social act. Fans often showcase their collectibles to other fans, and discuss their own collections. I describe consumption as a 'private' act here only to emphasize the contrast between collecting memorabilia, which can be a private act, and demonstrating one's affiliation, which is inherently a public act.

[42] Lancaster, K. *Warlocks and Warpdrive.* 1999, 78.

[43] Hills. 28.

6. Related Activities

This section explores a range of touchpoints that provide media consumers with opportunities to engage in structured, show-related activities. Activities, in this context, describe pursuits that require media consumers to take an active role and participate (as opposed to content and products, which might enable various activities, but are themselves received through a one-way process of consumption). Show-related activities can take at least four forms: themed activities, experiential activities, productive activities and challenge activities.

6.1. Themed Activities

"Themed activities" refer to those show-related pastimes that, much like the generic branded merchandise described earlier, have no inherent or inextricable relationship to the program. Instead, themed activities have been retrofitted with "show-related material and themes" to make the activity relevant.

When such offerings are a logical fit with the content and basic appeals of a show, themed activities have significant benefits: themed games and activities are often inexpensive to produce, and provide a cost-effective method for generating prolonged interaction between a media consumer and the show's own brand. The website for NBC's workplace sitcom *The Office* includes (among other diversions) an *Office*-themed version of solitaire, with playing cards depicting the show's characters and generic office supplies, and a simple fighting game that pits animated bobble-head figurines (of *Office* character Dwight Schrute and *Apprentice* star Donald Trump) against each other in a boxing match set on a conference table. For another show, such themed activities might seem both banal and illogical; in the context of *The Office*, which derives much of its humor from the awkward, banal and impersonal nature of the modern office environment, these activities provide compelling diversions that convey and reinforce the show's basic appeal. Such activities, one can assume, are precisely the sort of generic, time-wasting activities that the show's characters might seek out to avoid doing their own work.

Themed activities can also prove compelling when developed in relation to programs with strong, likable and iconic characters. Few shows have made better use of themed activities than *The Simpsons*, whose characters have appeared in themed implementations of several common game formats (e.g. bowling, driving, etc).

On the other hand, when themed activities are developed which fail to enhance (or even correspond with) the specific pleasurable aspects of a program, the results can be perplexing (at best), or in a worst case scenario, downright insulting to a show's audience. A simple example of this might consist of a simple jigsaw puzzle which, when assembled, reveals a show-related image or logo: except in the extremely rare case of television programs focused on jigsaw puzzles, such an offering would do little to improve, deepen or reinforce a viewer's relationship with the core television program.[44] Instead, such themed activities can appear transparent and patronizing, designed not for the benefit of the audience, but to serve the interests of sponsoring advertisers, who generally interpret all show-related activities as opportunities to reach potential consumers with brand messages.

6.2. Experiential Activities

"Experiential activities" are those pastimes that place participants in a specific role, which in turn allows them to experience show-related thrills through their own actions. Unlike the previous touchpoint categories, which allow viewers to engage with television properties primarily through relevant acts of consumption (of content, information or products), experiential activities cast the participant as an active agent with varying degrees of autonomy and control. While almost all experiential activities relate to a show's narrative and themes, the available examples demonstrate that they can do so in a variety of ways.

The most common implementations of this touchpoint are show-related computer games, board games, role-playing games and online activities.

In some cases, activities focus on evoking specific moments and recreating activities from an existing episodes of a program, offering viewer-participants the chance to experience those moments themselves in what amounts to an interactive, performative adaptation.[45]

For programs that already adhere to the structure of games or competitions (e.g., almost all reality television), such activities are generally designed to place the viewer in the role of a contestant. Videogame

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[44] In chapter five's in-depth evaluation of the various engagement opportunities surrounding ABC's *Lost*, this exact scenario arises.
[45] Kurt Lancaster has dedicated an entire book to surveying the various experiential activities and opportunities developed in relation to *Babylon 5*. (Lancaster, K. *Interacting with Babylon 5.* 2001.)

implementations of *Wheel of Fortune* and *Jeopardy* were among the first television-based "experiences" offered, and newer games now allows players to compete in shows ranging from *American Idol* to *The Apprentice*.

In other cases, experiential opportunities offer new narrative sequences and objectives that are grounded in the familiar themes and recognizable motifs of the series. Within these activities, which most often take the form of videogames, players are generally positioned within one of four possible roles:

(1) As themselves, or original characters of their own design. In the *Desperate Housewives* videogame, the player assumes the role of a new housewife who has moved onto Wisteria Lane, and is quickly drawn into the drama and intrigue that characterizes the show's narrative.

(2) As recognizable characters from the program. In the *24* videogame, players are given the chance to perform the central role of Jack Bauer as he moves through a 24-hour sequence of events structured in the same fashion as each season of the show, while in *Buffy The Vampire Slayer: Chaos Bleeds* (2003), the player alternately assumes the roles of Buffy, Xander, Willow, Spike and Faith, as needed.

(3) As a new token character. In most of the videogames developed around the *CSI* franchise, the player is cast in the role of a new detective who has been assigned to partner with one of the show's lead characters. Similarly, the *ER* videogame positions the player as a new intern in the hospital where the show is set, assigned to more familiar characters.

(4) As an unspecified agent. Many game formats place more emphasis on specific rule structures (e.g., real-time strategy) or experiential opportunities (e.g. simulators) than on narrative exposition. As a result, the player is never assigned a specific identity, since an implied generic role will suffice: providing additional details about the player's assumed role would not only be irrelevant to their subsequent experience, but would undermine the player's ability to imagine themselves in the role of the unspecified agent driving the action.

Some experiential activities are less narrative and goal-oriented, and may offer participants the chance to navigate through information within a diegetic framework while performing a role, or simply provide the freedom to roam freely through immersive implementations of recognizable environments and settings from a television program. In his analysis of Dawson's Desktop, Caldwell described a feature that invited visitors to "take a 360-degree 'virtual tour' of the show's Potter's Bed and Breakfast (a real set in the production, but a fictional building on the show). To Caldwell, such immersive experiences could be described as

technological augmentations, designed to "[enable] viewers to live vicariously in a constructed diegetic world and space outside of the show."[46]

Kurt Lancaster has written an entire chapter detailing and evaluating one such experience developed around *Babylon 5*, which casts the viewer-user as a visitor to the show's titular space station, and provides them with a choice of tour guides who will (ostensibly) offer different perspectives while guiding them through their experience[47]. A similar approach was taken in developing *The X-Files: Unrestricted Access*, which was little more than a database of detailed information on each case depicted during the television series. Rather than simply providing this information "straight," however, *Unrestricted Access* positioned the user as a hacker who had broken into a top-secret government database – a role that lent the experience a conspiratorial aura, similar to the tone that pervaded the television series itself.

With increasing frequency, television creators and producers are also experimenting with the development of experiential activities that also function as narrative extensions. This is not entirely without precedent: most of the games developed around *Buffy the Vampire Slayer,* for example, were designed – much like the licensed fiction described in this chapter's earlier discussion of narrative extensions – as "lost episodes," depicting events that took place at specific moments in the larger narrative timeline of the series. However, it is one thing to develop a game that doesn't contradict an existing narrative, as with the *Buffy* games, and quite another to produce a game that actively fills in narrative gaps and provides new canonical information that has previously been withheld, as in the recent video game of *24* (2006), which acts as a narrative bridge between the second and third seasons of the television program.

Since May 2006, when the producers of *Lost* launched a summer-long transmedia campaign called The Lost Experience[48], a growing number of television programs have also experimented with narrative extensions in the form of alternate reality games (ARGs), elaborate interactive campaigns that require viewers

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[46] Caldwell. 52.
[47] Lancaster. 112-27.
[48] The Lost Experience is addressed in more detail in Chapter 4, Section 2

to work together to solve complicated puzzles, riddles and other challenges in order to uncover information or reconstruct a narrative.[49]

In late 2006, NBC's *Heroes* launched an ARG entitled The Heroes 360 Experience, which featured regular installments of "original content created specifically for TV, online, and mobile" throughout the second half of the show's first season.[50]   Content releases were synchronized with episode broadcasts, making the show itself an important resource for understanding and solving the various challenges presented in the game.

As the campaign's titular emphasis on "experience" suggests, the *Heroes* ARG was designed to provide participants with a meaningful, exciting and novel experience, and empower them with a more active role than standard viewing allowed. However, to the frustration of many participants, ARGs often impose challenges in order to access content, yet allow no interaction with the content itself. As such, the experience of participating in a campaign such as The Heroes 360 Experience often falls somewhere between the voyeuristic passivity of traditional media consumption and the game-like experience of active participation.

6.3. Productive Activities

"Productive activities" describe those touchpoints that position viewers, whether as individuals or collaborators, as authors and producers of 'new' content. It is important to note that in this context, productive activities do not extend so far as to encompass Fiske's notion of semiotic productivity, which asserts that television viewing is always a fundamentally active and productive experience, insofar as viewers are required to construct meanings and form interpretations of content while watching it. While Fiske is right to assert that this process of meaning-making represents a meaningful and active process of productivity, it is also something of a semantic conflation: generating interpretations and readings might constitute a process of producing meaning, but meaning itself does not become tangible – and therefore a

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[49] In research conducted for MIT's Convergence Culture Consortium (C3), I have written extensively on the history, structure and significance of alternate reality games, both as a form of storytelling and as a mechanism for generating audience engagement. See Askwith, I, This Is Not (Just) An Advertisement: Understanding Alternate Reality Games (Cambridge, MA: Convergence Culture Consortium, 2006)..

[50] NBC-Heroes, Heroes Wiki, 2006, Available: http://www.nbc.com/Heroes/wiki.. NBC-Heroes, Heroes 360 Experience, 2006, Available: http://www.nbc.com/Heroes/360.

"product" – until it is manifested or expressed in a concrete form (e.g., discussion posts, mash-up videos, etc).

The range of productive touchpoints implemented around current television programs demonstrates that such activities can result in the creation of knowledge, creative and expressive work, and social texts.

Knowledge. At present, one of the most popular new productive touchpoints is the wiki, an online tool that enables entire communities to author and revise massive hypertextual information resources. The recent integration of show-specific wikis into a wide range of official program websites can be interpreted, at some level, as evidence of the television's industry's growing awareness that online communities represent sites of 'collective intelligence.' Applying the work of French cyber-theorist Pierre Lévy to the behavior of online fan communities, Jenkins recently explained collective intelligence as "the ability of virtual communities to leverage the combined expertise of their members."[51] As television networks and advertisers become aware of these 'knowledge communities', and recognize the profound satisfaction that viewers can experience through participation in group endeavors, more television programmers are beginning to offer activities that position their shows as the basis for communal collaboration.

Creative & Expressive Works. Many productive activities provide viewers with opportunities to create, produce, and distribute their own original or remixed content, albeit within well-defined boundaries. As such, the most common examples of expressive extensions are remix and mash-up tools, which provide Internet visitors with access to "raw" content and production assets, including unused video footage, sound effects and music tracks, graphics and so on, and empower them to experiment with creating new meanings and interpretations from existing material.

While "official" expressive extensions arise as part of the current YouTube-powered trend toward encouraging and showcasing user-generated content, dedicated viewers within television fandom have been producing unauthorized expressive work for decades, a practice that has received a great deal of attention

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[51] Jenkins. 27.

within fan studies. It is too soon to determine whether the value and significance of producing expressive and creative work will be transformed by official recognition. In the meantime, however, this change is likely to compel some viewers to experiment with expressive production who lacked the motivation to do so in the past.

Social Texts. Participation in show-based online communities can also be considered an example of productive activity, insofar as participants generate new texts as a byproduct of communicating their ideas to others. These texts may serve a wide range of functions, allowing their creators to express opinions and preferences, share personal interpretations and readings of specific program texts, propose creative alternatives, construct analytical theories, voice unrealized or unfulfilled desires, or, in many cases, serve no productive function at all.

6.4. Challenge Activities

Finally, "challenge activities" are those pastimes that provide viewers with an opportunity to demonstrate their skills, competencies or expert capabilities – often gained through attentive viewing of a television program – as a means of overcoming challenges. Examples of such activities include the all-but-ubiquitous trivia quiz, which allows viewers to demonstrate their competency at recalling show-related details, and multiplayer competitions such as ABC's *Enhanced TV*, which pose a common challenge to large groups of viewers, and reward the winners with recognition or prizes.

In a sense, most videogames based on television properties – described earlier in this section as experiential activities – can also be interpreted as challenge activities, insofar as they provide structural goals and challenge players to achieve them. It is somewhat ironic to note that television-based videogames are often less likely to emphasize the inherent satisfaction of overcoming challenges than their independent counterparts, since games linked to television programs often place a greater emphasis on satisfying the viewer's desire for immersion or expanded access to the world, characters, or narrative of the television series upon which the games is based.

7. Social Interaction

Fan studies have long indicated that for many consumers, television viewing is a fundamentally social experience. The social practice of watching television with family and friends is as old as the medium itself, and some of the first active Internet communities arose as spaces where fans of specific television programs could congregate to engage in discussion with other like-minded viewers, and on rare occasions, with "celebrities" involved in the production of these programs.

By the mid-1990's, recognizing that these communities were strengthening and reinforcing the core audiences for their programs, the producers and marketers of many niche and genre shows (e.g. *Babylon 5*, *The X-Files*) began to take a more active role in enabling and encouraging social interactions around their programs. In the past five or ten years, however, this trend has accelerated and spread, to the point where many television programs in all genres and formats now offer at least one "official" social forum enabling interaction between fans, with many programs offering far more. Through structures such as blogs, moderated chats, social networking sites (e.g. MySpace) and message boards, the Internet has also made it easier for the performers, producers, writers and creators of television programming to participate in more direct and frequent social interactions with members of the audience.

As the television business moves to adopt a discourse focused on viewer engagement, social interactions – and the relationships, both real and imagined, that these interactions enable – gain a new level of importance. In their formulation of "connectedness," Russell et al emphasized the importance of these television-based social interactions and relationships, and proposed three distinct 'types' of relationship related to television consumption: *vertical connections*, describing the relationship between a viewer and a program; *horizontal connections*, describing the social relationship between viewers; and *vertizontal* connections, combining aspects of both, describing the imagined relationships between viewers and television characters [see *Figure 1: Connections Within Television Consumption*].[52]

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[52] Russell, C A*, et al.* "People and "Their" Television Shows." *The Psychology of Entertainment Media*, ed. Shrum. 2004, 278.
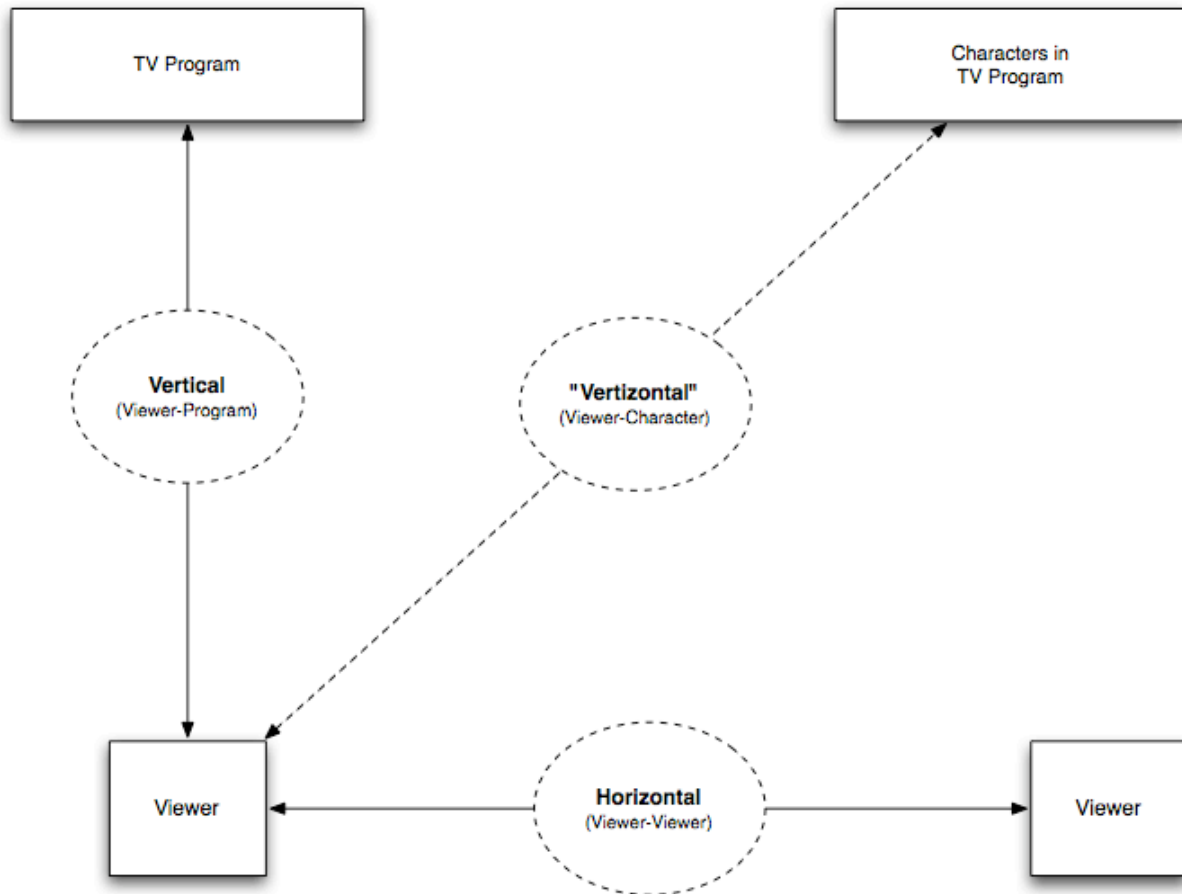
FIGURE 1: CONNECTIONS WITHIN TELEVISION CONSUMPTION (RUSSELL ET AL)

The authors explain their proposed relationship types as follows.

Vertical connections (viewer-program) describe the commitment that individual viewers feel toward their favorite programs, and may manifest themselves through such behaviors as:

- Viewer re-arranging schedule in order to watch the show when it airs.

- Viewer experiences adverse emotions when missing an episode.

- Viewer experiences elevated mood during and after viewing an episode.

- As vertical relationships evolve, "viewers characteristically perceive the show as being well-written or produced, and recommend the show to others."[53]
- Viewers may collect objects relating to the show, such as books or pictures.

Horizontal connections (viewer-viewer), on the other hand, focus on the interpersonal relationships that viewers form with other viewers "around" the show. According to the authors, such connections might result in:

- Viewers drawing upon program as part of their social identity.
- Viewers perceiving programs as "integral" to relationships with others.
- Viewers choosing to watch the program in groups and social settings.
- Viewers joining official show-based communities, such as fan clubs.

Finally, **vertizontal connections** (viewer-character) describe the imagined and parasocial interactions that viewers develop with characters on their favorite programs. Such relationships may result in:

- Viewers thinking of characters as "real people" who live in "real time"
- Viewers may feel as if they can relate to, or interact with, the characters
- Viewers may aspire to become more like the characters (as they perceive them).[54]

While I find these formulations a useful starting point, there are a few points that require some rethinking. First, as seen in Figure 1, the authors seem to be suggesting that vertical relationships (between a viewer and a program) are bi-directional and reciprocal – yet while it is clear how a television program can influence a viewer, and how viewers' feelings may alter their perceptions of a program, only in very specific and rare situations[55] do viewers have any actual impact on the content or form of the program. As such, while it is reasonable to claim that relationships exist between viewers and programs, it is misleading to

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[53] Ibid., 279.
[54] Ibid.
[55] Examples of these situations are provided in this chapter: see the discussion in Section 7 (Interactivity).

frame these relationships as comparable to those between (for example) one viewer and another, since such relationships allow for "true interaction", rather than influence and reaction.

Perhaps more importantly, the three relationship types described here, while useful in understanding how individual viewers may feel and act in relation to television programming, do not provide an accurate reflection of the emerging range of relationships that take place in relation to television consumption. As more programs embrace the Internet and other new media technologies, new relationship possibilities and patterns emerge, with the viewer gaining (in many but not all cases) opportunities to establish real (non-imagined) contact, both with celebrities (who are not accounted for in the three-relationship model described above) and with characters (or, more precisely, authorized proxies assuming the role of those characters).

A more accurate model indicating the possible social relationships available to television viewers, then, is presented in Figure 2. The model proposed here retains the general intention and language of the framework introduced by Russell et al, but removes "the program," with which genuine interaction is impossible, and introduces "celebrities,"[56] with whom a certain degree of interaction is now feasible. It also recognizes the formal possibility for interaction between a viewer and a (fictional) character, though the somewhat awkward "vertizontal" title has been replaced with the more precise (if less whimsical) "diagonal."

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[56] The term *celebrities,* as used here, refers not just to a program's cast, but to any individual who gains prestige in the mind of the viewer due to their formal affiliation with the show – i.e. writers, producers, creators, etc.
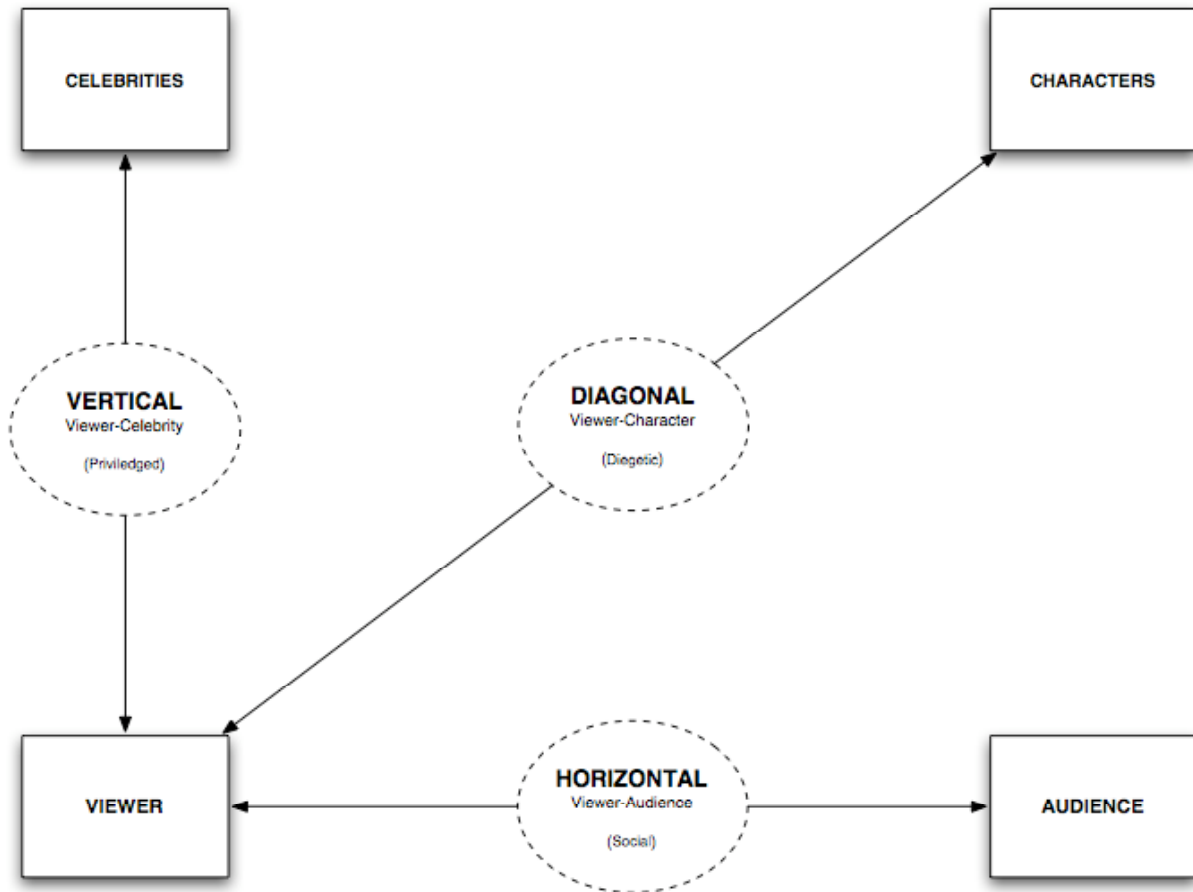
FIGURE 2: REVISED MODEL OF POSSIBLE RELATIONSHIPS

Finally, a brief word is required to address the concept of parasocial interaction (PSI). While Russell et al intended PSI to refer to the imagined (and essentially impossible) relationships between viewers and television characters, PSI – as explained in Giles' *Media Psychology* – has a broader definition, and describes any interaction wherein the viewer "respond[s] to a media figure as though he/she/it were a real person."[57] Thus, PSI can take many forms, encompassing our imagined relationship both with fictional characters *and* the actors who portray them. Giles differentiates between three "levels" of PSI:

> ranging from Level 1 PSI, at which the interaction is with a media figure who represents him- or herself (e.g., a presenter or newsreader); to Level 2 PSI, at which a human actor represents a fictional character

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[57] Giles, D. *Media Psychology.* 2003, 188.

(e.g., a soap star); to Level 3 PSI, at which the figure is nonhuman (e.g., a cartoon character). With each successive level, a social relationship with the media figure becomes less of a possibility.[58]

Yet, while this offers a useful distinction, Giles' conclusion – that each level of PSI makes a social relationship less possible – is no longer as true as it would have been even five years ago. As television ventures deeper into diegetic experimentation, creating the types of "experiential activities" and "diegetic extensions" described earlier in this chapter, limited possibilities for social interaction with media figures (or, at the very least, the illusion of social interaction) are becoming more common, as this chapter's subsequent overviews of Vertical and Diagonal interactions will illustrate.

7.1. Horizontal: Audience Communities

The most common forms of social interaction available to media consumers are "horizontal" relationships, and involve peer-to-peer interactions between members of a program's audience. In the context of this chapter, which focuses on the specific opportunities developed by the television industry to promote engagement with (and around) content, these relationships are facilitated and enabled primarily through the creation of online social spaces and activities. Such touchpoints result in the formation of virtual communities, which foster direct interaction between members of the audience and enable participation in a community of viewers. While the focus of any given community will be a function of the specific viewers who participate and the specific show the community is dedicated to, virtual communities allow, and encourage, several possible forms of engagement.

Some of the most common activities in television communities include (but are not limited to):
- Evaluating and interpreting the show's "text" (i.e., narrative events, characters);
- Sharing emotional and creative responses to the program;
- Interpreting the show (as industrial product, structured text, etc.);
- Analyzing the show through critical discussion and debate;
- Expressing theories, attitudes, opinions and preferences;

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[58] Ibid. *Media Psychology.* 192.

• Proposing alternate textual 'readings" and new possibilities;

• Cultivating new relationships based upon shared passions or interests.

In his discussion of emerging online strategies used to foster audience engagement with television programming, Caldwell noted that such spaces often function as "metacritical augmentations": spaces where viewers could "weigh in with critical analysis and dialogue on the given series."[59]

Of course, virtual communities aren't exactly a new strategy for creating viewer engagement: online groups for discussing television programs have existed for almost as long as the Internet itself. The first such communities appeared in Usenet groups and on dial-up Bulletin-Board Systems (BBS), beginning in the 1980s, and increased exponentially as the web became a mainstream medium. As such, there is a tremendous amount of academic literature and research exploring the dynamics, implications and behaviors present in these spaces.[60]

In the past several years, however, a growing number of television programs have also launched their own "official" message boards and community spaces; as the *Ad*VIZR New Media Audit* reported, in a survey of 2,233 individual television programs, "just more than 50 percent of all the programs measured [had] a Message Board extension," making it "the most popular touchpoint available."[61] And, while many viewers still prefer to participate in unbranded "independent" communities, such as *Ain't It Cool News* and *Television Without Pity*, the emergence of official, show-sponsored communities often encourages less net-savvy viewers to participate.

Since 2004-2005, an increasing number of shows have also attempted to attract new users by participating in social networking sites, and creating official profiles for both shows and characters at MySpace. In April 2007, NBC embraced social networking even further, announcing their intention to launch an NBC-specific social network at the beginning of June, "allowing all of our fans to connect with

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[59] Caldwell. 53.

[60] In particular, interested readers should refer to Baym, N K. *Tune In, Log On: Soaps, Fandom and Online Community.* New Media Cultures 2000. and Wilson, T. *The Playful Audience: From Talk Show Viewers to Internet Users.* 2004..

[61] Ad*VIZR™ New Media Audit 2006/07.

each other and interact with our shows in exciting new ways."[62] Given the rapid proliferation of social

networking sites, however, it is possible that NBC's move to launch their own branded social network will

backfire: if the effort required for viewers to participate in an additional social network outweighs the benefits

of participation, it is entirely possible that they will opt out, forcing television marketers to continue reaching

them in more "public" forums like MySpace and Facebook.

It is also important to recognize that virtual communities, which serve as sites for the production of

what Fiske referred to as "tertiary textuality," are increasingly used to generate a high volume of content that a

program's audience can access, at very little cost. As these social spaces become a strategic component in

promoting television franchises, rather than autonomous sites for fan interaction, they migrate — as Caldwell

has suggested — from tertiary texts toward a new status as related primary texts.

7.2. Vertical: Celebrity Access

"Vertical interactions" describe the limited (but increasingly frequent) opportunities for individual

audience members to interact with television celebrities. While these vertical interactions often take place in

the same social spaces and structures used for horizontal interactions, the participation of celebrities often

prompts involvement from new viewers who are otherwise uninterested in participating in show-centered

communities and social interactions.

Historically, audiences have demonstrated the most interest in communicating with, and being

acknowledged by, a show's performers. In recent years, however, the television world has produced a rising

number of "auteur" writers and producers who enjoy name recognition among large portions of the

American television audience (e.g., Abrams, Sorkin, Kelley, Whedon). As a result, mainstream television

audiences are gradually taking a more active interest in television professionals who work behind the scenes.

While this has long been true with certain cult shows (e.g., *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, *Star Trek*, *Babylon 5*),

the trend is now moving toward mainstream programming. As such, the designation of 'celebrity' (as used

in this section) describes any individual with some official role in the show's production.

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[62] NBC, NBC: Social Networking, 30 April 2007 2007, Available: http://www.nbc.com/Social_Networking.

One of the best-documented examples of interaction between television viewers and celebrities is the frequent participation of *Babylon 5* creator and writer J. Michael Straczynski, who was among the most active contributors to a Usenet discussion group dedicated to his creation. Even before the show debuted on television, Straczynski began using the online forum to generate interest in the program, sharing behind-the-scenes anecdotes and updates and answering audience questions and criticisms head-on.[63] While his responses were often hostile and controversial, the extent of his direct involvement with the audience remains unparalled: by one estimate, Straczynski posted over 17,000 messages during *Babylon 5*'s five-year run[64].

More recently, several celebrities on *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* showed an exceptional willingness for direct (albeit limited) interaction with fans, surfacing as frequent contributors on a dedicated Buffy message board called The Bronze[65], and subsequently posting (and responding to comments) at a fan-maintained weblog dedicated to all things Whedon, called, appropriately enough, Whedonesque[66].

Now, as mainstream viewers begin to wade into waters that were once the exclusive province of hardcore fans, television networks are encouraging more celebrities to make time for direct interactions with the audience. The most common form of this is the blog, which often functions much like a message board, but without the free-for-all chaos that results from all participants being able to start new discussion topics. Weblogs, unlike message boards, position the celebrity cleanly at the center of the proceeding, while giving viewers the opportunity to post their own responses and comments. The celebrity then has the opportunity to decide whether or not to respond, and if so, to which comments. Such interactions are coordinated both as formal promotional strategies (such as Shonda Rhimes' blog for *Grey's Anatomy[67]*) and as informal, voluntary efforts by individual celebrities (such as the blog Jane Espenson, an ex-*Buffy* writer who is now a writer and co-Executive Producer for *Battlestar Galactica*, who writes about her experiences and insights into television writing[68]).

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[63] While the specific (and often controversial) nature of Straczynski's involvement in rec.arts.sf.tv.babylon5 is beyond the scope of this discussion, interested readers will find compelling accounts in Lancaster. 1-10, 20-30. and Wexelblat.

[64] Lancaster. 20. If this figure is correct, Straczynski's participation averages out to 9.32 posts *per day* for the entire five years.

[65] For a more detailed discussion about the significance of *The Bronze* as a site of fan-producer interaction, see Zweernik, A and S N Gatson. "www.buffy.com: Cliques, Boundaries, and Hierarchies in an Internet Community." ed. Lavery. 2002..

[66] Whedonesque, Available: http://www.whedonesque.com.

[67] ABC-Greys, Grey Matter: From the Writers of Grey's Anatomy.

[68] Espenson, J, Jane in Progress, Available: http://www.janeespenson.com.

In an interview with *USA Today*, Eric Haney, executive producer of CBS drama *The Unit*, reported that he spends about five minutes each week writing a few paragraphs for the show's weblog. According to Haney, the blog is designed to give viewers "a little inside peek" at the show. As he explained, "Everyone [in the audience] wants to feel like you're sitting down to talk with them."[69]

An increasing number of celebrities are also experimenting with participation in social networking sites. The most active site for such experimentation, at least for now, is MySpace. Through their MySpace profiles, celebrities can publish a blog, post personal information and photos, and approve "friend requests" from the site's 100-million-plus registered users. These users can then leave them comments and send them messages.[70]

7.3. Diagonal: Diegetic Interaction

As noted earlier in this chapter, two increasingly popular types of engagement touchpoint – diegetic extensions and experiential activities – provide viewers with the sensation of direct access to the characters, artifacts, settings or narrative events of their favorite programs. When such efforts produce not only content, but also opportunities (however limited they might be) for direct interaction, the result can be described (per the earlier discussion of possible types of social relationships related to television consumption) as "diagonal" interactions. At present, the most common opportunities for diegetic interaction are alternate reality games (which often require participants to "interact" with characters from within the diegetic space of a television narrative) and blogs (which allow users to leave comments in response to blog posts that are presented as the work of television characters).

Most of the characters on NBC's *The Office* and *Heroes* have MySpace profiles, which are updated on a regular basis. Similarly, on *30 Rock*, the character Frank (a writer for *The Girly Show*, the diegetic sketch-comedy program that acts as the workplace setting for *30 Rock* itself) posts regular anecdotes from

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[69] Oldenburg. "TV Goes to Blogs,"

[70] For a particularly entertaining account of what these interactions can be like from the celebrity's point of view, readers are referred to a recent entry in the blog of fan-favorite *Firefly* actor Nathan Fillion. (Fillion, N. "Tasty Riffs, Continued Requests, and Birds of Precious Metal." *MySpace*. 18 May 2007.)

"behind-the-scenes,"[71] and frequently responds to comments left by "his" readers.[72]   These diegetic blog posts, as well as the subsequent in-character responses posted in response to comments from actual viewers, create an unusual situation in which the viewer (or in this context, comment-poster) is simultaneously engaging in diegetic interaction *and* knowingly performing a role. Since most television viewers are aware that these characters do not exist outside of the television programs that feature them, and as such, that these diegetic posts are actually in-character performances by writers who have been assigned to generate content, the resulting interaction does not quite match Giles' definition of parasocial interaction (wherein the viewer responds to a media figure as if the figure were a real person). Instead, such interactions ask the viewer to respond to a writer, while pretending that they are responding to a fictional character (what Giles described as a Level 2 PSI figure). While it is too soon to know how these interactions impact viewers, it is clear that new opportunities for "authorized" diegetic interaction with television characters will require some revision to the existing models of parasocial interaction.

8. Interactivity

The experience of interacting with a program remains one of the most difficult – but also one of the most effective – methods of generating meaningful audience engagement with a program. Yet at the same time, the concept of "interactivity" can be a difficult one, so overloaded with possible meanings that it becomes almost meaningless. At the most basic level, "interaction" can be defined as any process that involves the reciprocal (bi-directional) exchange of actions and reactions that occur between two or more entities. In relation to television, however, opportunities for interaction tend to fall into one of four possible categories:

(1) Mechanical interaction, describing the physical and material interactions between a viewer and a television set, such as changing the channel, using a remote control to select from multiple on-screen options, or using a controller to interact with a video game;

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[71] NBC-30Rock, Frank Talk, 2007, Available: http://blog.nbc.com/frank.
[72] Yet, since the show itself doesn't exist, these blog posts actually constitute one type of engagement touchpoint (diegetic extensions) simulating another (extratextual information.

(2) Content activation, describing restricted opportunities for interaction between a viewer and a program (or program-related content), wherein the viewer chooses from a set of possible predetermined actions in order to trigger the corresponding pre-programmed reactions, such as playing a computer game;

(3) Content interaction, describing the process of "true" interaction between a viewer and a program, during which both the viewer and the program can have some noticeable impact on each other, such as voting to determine a program's outcome; or

(4) Social interaction, describing communicative interactions between two or more people, such as conversation with friends and colleagues, participation in online discussion, or competition with other humans.

In semantic terms, other possible forms of interaction exist, such as the "imaginative interaction" between a viewer and a television program that occurs when viewers consume content and generate meanings or interpretations. However, unless these generated meanings are communicated to others through one of the four forms of interaction described here, the interaction is not reciprocal (i.e., the viewer reacts to the program, but the program cannot react to the viewer in any formal or tangible sense). As such, the process of television engagement is limited to the four types of interaction described here.

Of these, the first (mechanical interaction) can be disregarded, since it concerns itself with interaction in the most literal sense. While turning on a television or turning the pages in a book are legitimate examples of interaction, they are not examples of meaningful viewer engagement. The second (content activation) has already been accounted for, in the form of themed, experiential and challenge activities, and the fourth (social interaction) has been addressed as social interaction.

The remaining option (content interaction) is the final form of touchpoint proposed in this chapter, and is among the least common and most effective approaches to generating engagement currently available. Content interaction, in turn, encompasses two more specific levels of possible interaction between viewers and content: acknowledged contributions and influential interactions.

8.1. Acknowledged Contributions

In *Digital Storytelling*, Carolyn Handler-Miller proposes that "contribution" is one of six basic types of interaction, and uses the designation to describe interactions wherein "the user can send information"

which is then "assembled or tallied and fed back to the users" in aggregate.[73] As such, "acknowledged contribution" touchpoints are those that provide a specific, structured opportunity for viewers to make a contribution, and to have that contribution acknowledged (e.g. polls, displaying text messages on-screen, etc).[74] Such contributions may be acknowledged within a television program itself, or within one of the program's associated touchpoints, such as a website. However, an acknowledged contribution cannot meaningfully alter or influence the outcome or direction of a program.

8.2. Influential Interactions

By contrast, "influential interactions" offer viewers the chance to exert some degree of meaningful influence in the direction or outcome of a television program. This is what the phrase "interactive television" most often evokes — programs that offer some level of meaningful interaction, allowing viewers to determine or alter the program itself.

The challenge, of course, is how to make broadcast content, distributed to a mass audience, responsive and reactive to viewer input. In order for viewers to have some influence over the outcome of a television show, one of two conditions must be true: (1) Several different possible outcomes must be recorded and prepared in advance, with viewer input being used to determine which possible outcome is activated, or (2) the program must either be recorded live, and capable of adjusting its outcome based on real-time response.

Law & Order: Criminal Intent demonstrated the former approach in October 2004, when the show's producers allowed audience members to vote on a character's fate. According to NBC, more than 116,000 viewers voted to decide whether one of the program's recurring guest stars should live or die. Even more impressively, "viewers' usage of NBC.com increased 460 percent following the broadcast,"[75]

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[73] Miller, C H. *Digital Storytelling: A Creator's Guide to Interactive Entertainment.* 2004, 60. According to Miller, the other possible forms of interaction are (1) stimulus-response, (2) free navigation, (3) manipulating virtual objects, (4) communicating with other agents, and (5) receiving or acquiring objects. These forms can be combined in different ways to create more complex interactive experiences.

[74] Carolyn Handler-Miller has proposed that there are six basic types of interactivity, the fifth of which is contribution. Miller uses this designation to describe interaction

[75] NBC. "MORE THAN 116,000 VIEWERS CAST VOTE ON FATE OF NICOLE WALLACE, 'LAW & ORDER: CRIMINAL INTENT'S' RECURRING MURDERESS GUEST-STAR." Press Release. 21 October 2004.

suggesting that influential opportunities can be compelling incentives for involvement, even among viewers who normally demonstrate little desire to engage with the program outside of the viewing process.

Providing the audience with such opportunities generally involves additional production work prior to broadcast: all possible outcomes are shot and edited in advance, with real-time audience input determining which possible outcome is activated during the broadcast. As such, viewers who frequently explore DVD bonus features will recognize this as a broadcast adaptation of the "alternate ending."

However, while allowing viewers to choose between several possible outcomes might be feasible, it is has two disadvantages. First, it is expensive, requiring the production of finished content that won't appear during broadcast, and second, it often doesn't feel "truly interactive," since viewers know that there is no single 'right' ending, and that all of the possibilities and outcomes have been designed and prepared in advance. As such, the viewer's experience of these influential opportunities tends to be less compelling and convincing than viewer interaction with a live show, where viewer input explicitly influences the show during the production process.

This latter approach to influential interactivity is exemplified by *American Idol*, which allows viewers to vote in real-time to determine the outcome of a competition. Since *American Idol*'s debut in 2002, it has established itself as a programming juggernaut, capable not only of consistently dominating the ratings in its timeslot, but generating an astonishing level of audience participation. As Jenkins noted in *Convergence Culture*, "by the final week of its third season, each episode of A*merican Idol* was generating more than 20 million telephone calls or text messages from viewers who wanted to vote for their favorite contestant."[76] In fact, while only 24 million votes were registered during the broadcast of *Idol*'s second season finale, U.S. telephone providers Verizon and SBC reported that call volume for the evening was more than 230 million calls over the normal volume, and suggested that over 200 million callers may simply have been unable to get through to vote.[77]

While *American Idol* offers other viewing pleasures in addition to audience voting, such figures suggest allowing the audience to provide influential input remains one of the most compelling available drivers of audience engagement. The prospect of influential interaction is also one of the only strategies

[76] Jenkins. 59.
[77] Paulsen, W. "'American Idol' voting overtaxed U.S. phone systems." *Reality TV World*. 27 May 2003.

remaining for programmers seeking to turn a show into "appointment viewing." After all, if viewers have to be watching during the live broadcast in order to influence the outcome, there is a compelling incentive to watch the show in real time. Just as important is the incentive for viewers to experience a personal, emotional investment in the outcome of the program, since – if only in the most limited fashion – voting viewers gain a sense of authorship and control over the outcome. At present, *American Idol*, which makes broadcast television "responsive" to viewer input, is the closest approximation of true interactive television available.

For all of these strengths, however, programs such as *American Idol* have two inherent weaknesses. First, given that such shows must be produced in real time in order to meaningfully respond to audience input, the range of possible programming genres and formats will be severely limited[78]. Second, while *American Idol's* real-time format boosts its broadcast ratings, it also severely diminishes the program's long-term value: live programming loses much of its appeal when viewed after the fact, which means that shows such as *Idol* offer little potential for syndication, international licensing, and DVD sales.

Influential opportunities also exist in relation to shows that solicit viewer input through the submission of questions or suggestions, such as talk shows (e.g. *The O'Reilly Factor*) that accepts live telephone calls from viewers. In the past few years, other possible models for creating influential opportunities have also started to emerge. In February 2006, the producers of Showtime drama *The L Word* held a competition that asked fans to produce a "fanisode" (a short script re-imagining a scene from the show's first or second season), with the winning script appearing as part of a broadcast episode during the show's fifth season.[79] While specifics are not yet available, NBC – continuing their push to redefine themselves as NBC 2.0 – recently announced that *Medium* will hold a similar competition during their upcoming (2007-2008) season,[80] and that viewers of *Heroes* will be allowed to determine via online vote which of several new characters introduced in a six-episode miniseries will join the main ensemble cast as a series regular.

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[78] At the very least, this will remain true until television producers decide to re-embrace the model used in the earliest days of television, when most programs – drama included -- were broadcast live to television audiences.

[79] Showtime. "Competition Will Create First-Ever Network-Sanctioned, Fan-Written Original Script For the Critically-Acclaimed Drama." Press Release. 1 February 2006.

[80] LaMonica, P R. "NBC hopes for a return to must-see glory." *CNNMoney.com*. 14 May 2007.

Summary: Categorizing Opportunities for Engagement

Within the body of this chapter, I have proposed and articulated a framework that organizes the entire range of existing approaches to generating engagement into eight different categories, each representing a different potential 'site' where viewers can engage with what I have defined as expanded television texts. To summarize, these eight potential sites are:

(1) **Formal Program Qualities,** referring to the opportunities for engagement with the core program content of a television text, enabled by the program's narrative construction, premise, etc;

(2) **Expanded Access**, referring to the opportunities for engagement with the core program that result from the distribution of content through multiple platforms, devices and business models;

(3) **Repackaged Content**, referring to the opportunities for engagement with variations of core program content produced and distributed as repackaged/reorganized program content;

(4) **Ancillary Content**, referring to the opportunities for engagement with additional content developed to extend, enhance, contextualize, supplement, or provide information about the television text, including textual extensions and extratextual information;

(5) **Branded Products**, referring to the opportunities for engagement that emphasize practices of acquisition and ownership by the viewer, enabled by the production of show-related objects;

(6) **Related Activities**, referring to the opportunities for engagement that position the viewer as an active participant in program-related acts, including themed, experiential, productive, and challenge-oriented activities;

(7) **Social Interaction**, referring to the opportunities for engagement that position the television text as the basis or pretense for interaction with other viewers, the show's creative professionals, or the narrative's characters; and

(8) **Interactivity**, referring to the opportunities for engagement that allow some direct interaction between the viewer-participant and the television program, encompassing the more specific possibilities of acknowledged contribution and influential interactions.

While the touchpoint categories described in this chapter are intended to describe and organize a number of common strategies for transforming television into an "engagement medium," it is important to re-emphasize both that this framework is not intended to be comprehensive, and that the categories provided should not be seen as mutually exclusive. Instead, these categories are intended to function as an initial set of descriptive labels that describe the range of appeals that can be made to media consumers, and the range of engagement opportunities currently being used.

Throughout this chapter, where applicable, I have tried to indicate how individual touchpoint implementations can, and often do, draw upon more than one these categories. Just as importantly, there are a number of reasonable objections that might be made about these categories from a semantic perspective. All social interactions could also be described as both experiential activities (insofar as they offer a "social experience") and productive activities (insofar as they generate textual content or other material that can then be consumed by others). Many experiential activities could just as easily be seen as challenge activities (e.g. games), while others could be seen as textual extensions (program-integrated ARGs), and so on. As such, it is essential that these categories not be thought of as binding or definitive, but instead as a tool for better evaluating the various touchpoints developed around television programming, and assessing the specific value proposition that each of these touchpoints is making to the prospective consumer.

Having set out a series of categories describing the existing array of engagement touchpoints in terms of their value proposition to the viewer, the next chapter will outline five "logics of engagement" that can be used to understand and describe audience engagement, with each logic reflecting a distinct motive or desire that dictates the nature of the viewer's engagement with, and terms of evaluation for, the "expanded television texts" described above.

CHAPTER 3

Five Logics of Engagement

Having set out a framework describing the range of opportunities that can be developed for viewer engagement with the "expanded television text," this chapter explores five distinct "logics of engagements." Each of these logics reflects a distinct motive or desire that might compel the viewer to engage with television texts, and in doing so, suggests both the nature of the viewer's engagement with, and terms of evaluation for, the individual touchpoints used to facilitate engagement. Furthermore, a basic understanding of the logics described in this chapter can provide guidance in determining which touchpoints will be most beneficial to a given program, and why. In effect, then, each of the five logics of engagement discussed in this chapter can be understood as a paradigm, or lens, for viewing and understanding specific "engaged practices."

Before proceeding, however, it is important to note that the logics of engagement described below are not mutually exclusive. Instead, there are complex relationships and correlations between several of them, a fact that makes it both impossible and counter-productive to entirely separate them. In articulating these logics, then, the goal is not to establish a comprehensive and inviolable set of categories that explain the entire range of practices that constitute viewer engagement, but to introduce a series of descriptive labels that reflect the various relationships that viewers form and serve when engaging with expanded television texts.

It should also be noted that several of the logics described in this chapter (particularly those of mastery and immersion) draw heavily from existing literature on fandom, interactivity and consumption, and refer to desires, attitudes and behaviors that are often dismissed as "fan-specific" eccentricities. Yet, in attempting to understand television as an engagement medium, it is essential to understand how individual viewers have been able to engage with television texts in the past. More to the point, the behavior of television fans – who can also be interpreted as viewers who have demonstrated a deep, perpetual engagement with their favorite television texts – provides a glimpse of television's desired future, since television's revitalization as an active engagement medium, rather than a passive consumption medium, involves the reframing of "fan behavior" not as abnormal or eccentric, but as the norm. As television becomes an active,

engaging medium, all television viewers become "fans" of something – a trend that renders makes the literature on fan practices, motives and behaviors particularly important.

With those clarifications in place, the remainder of this chapter provides an outline of six distinct logics of engagement: (1) the logic of entertainment; (2) the logic of social connection; (3) the logic of mastery; (4) the logic of immersion; and (5) the logic of identification.

1. *We Like To Watch* (The Logic of Entertainment)

The most basic desire that compels viewers to seek out and watch television entertainment is just that: the pleasure of being entertained. While the desire for entertainment is a basic one, however, it is also one of the hardest to explain. Theories explaining the human need for entertainment, and the human interest in narrative, date back as far as the ancient philosophers (e.g. Aristotle's notion of emotional catharsis), with more recent explanations drawing on disciplines ranging from psychiatry to neurochemistry.

Working in the Uses & Gratifications (U&G) tradition, Denis McQuail identified entertainment as one of the main motives driving media consumption, and suggested more specifically that the desire for entertainment can reflect more specific motives, such as the desire to (1) escape from problems, (2) relax, (3) get intrinsic cultural or aesthetic enjoyment, (4) fill free time, (5) experience emotional release, and (6) experience sexual arousal.[1] For the purposes of this discussion, however, it is sufficient to recognize that the desire to experience pleasure and satisfaction through entertainment is among the most basic motives that compel viewers to seek out and consume television content. As such, the experience of being entertained can be considered one of the most basic – albeit least descriptive – modes of engagement.

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[1] McQuail, D. *Mass Communication Theory: An Introduction.* 1987, 73.

2. *Did You See That?* (The Logic of Social Connection)

Within the U & G model, the desire for social connection is also stated as one of the most frequent motives for consuming media content. According to McQuail, media viewing can fulfill a range of social functions, including: (1) gaining insight into circumstances of others; (2) identifying with others and gaining a sense of belonging; (3) finding a basis for conversation and social interaction; (4) having a substitute for real-life companionship; (5) helping to carry out social roles; and (6) enabling one to connect with family, friends and society.[2] When understanding a viewer's desire for social connection as a logic of engagement, the most important of these are television's capacities to provide viewers with a basis for conversation and social interaction and to create a sense of "belonging."

Basis for Social Interaction. Numerous studies in U & G have suggested that one of television's most important functions is its role as "a lubricant to interpersonal communications,"[3] by providing a basis and pretense for engaging in social interaction with other viewers. Similarly, Russell et al reported that in their interviews with television viewers, subjects often described their favorite programs as "being integral to their relationships with friends, family members and acquaintances,"[4]

A Sense of Belonging. Russell and Puto also reported that viewers who shared a mutual passion for specific programs often felt an instinctive connection with each other, suggesting that shared passion for a given program established an "implied relationship [or] a sort of common ground" between members of the audience.[5] In this regard, their findings echo Fiske's earlier observation that "solitary viewing can be experienced as group viewing, because the viewer knows well that other members of his/her group are viewing at the same time."[6] For many viewers, then, active investment in a specific television program may reflect a desire for social connection with viewers who share similar feelings, with the act of viewing or investing in a program serving as the basis for membership in an imagined community.

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[2] Ibid.*Mass Communication Theory: An Introduction.*
[3] Lee, B and R S Lee. "How and Why People Watch TV: Implications for the Future of Interactive Television," *Journal of Advertising Research*.November/December (1995): 14.
[4] Russell*, et al.*, 279.
[5] Russell and Puto. "Rethinking Television Audience Measures," 400.
[6] Fiske. 80.

Furthermore, Russell and Puto found that viewers with a high degree of knowledge often felt themselves to be part of "the in-group of connected viewers, who understand even the most subtle references," and that this distinguished them from "the out-group of less connected viewers." [7]

3. *Everyone's an Expert* (The Logic of Mastery)

Mastery describes a mode of engagement that satisfies the viewer's intellectual desire to master complexities, interpret nuances, and solve the challenges that a television series presents. As such, this mode of engagement embodies Hartley and Fiske's long-standing claim that watching television is always an active (and interactive) process of constructing meaning and interpretation.

The process of "mastering" a text can exist on a number of levels, and take a range of forms, depending on the viewer's personal interests and preferences, as well as the nature of the specific television program. In some cases, a viewer experiences a sense of mastery by predicting how a narrative sequence will be resolved, or guessing a character's hidden intentions. In other cases, mastery involves recognizing opaque references, seeing through red herrings, or simply being able to form a sophisticated assessment of a program by applying one's own interpretive and analytical skills to one's knowledge of the program. In all cases, however, this mode of engagement provides a specific form of pleasure often associated with games: the satisfaction of overcoming a challenge.

3.1. Mastering Narrative Formats

3.1.1. Episodic Narrative

It's simple enough to see the form that mastery would take for viewers of procedural dramas, which are structured around the introduction, investigation, and gradual resolution of a mystery. In such cases, a viewer – much like the investigating protagonist driving the narrative – would 'master' the text by guessing the outcome in advance. Since television procedurals tend to provide all of the relevant information required

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[7] (399)

for this sort of mastery within the episode where it is applicable, this may help explain the appeal of procedural programming in a culture where many viewers are pressed for time, and reluctant to commit to watching multiple episodes in order to experience the pleasures of mastery and narrative resolution.

3.1.2. Serial Narrative

However, many serialized and continuous television narratives offer additional, more subtle opportunities for "optional" mastery, which draw upon knowledge that a viewer could only acquire by watching several – or, in some cases, all – of the previous episodes of a program, providing an incentive for viewers to invest in a program by watching consistently and attentively.

As noted earlier, one of the hallmarks of modern American television programming is an overall shift toward the inclusion of serialized and continuous narrative threads in almost all fiction programming[8]. What makes this development particularly pleasurable to many television viewers is the potential it introduces for long-term mastery through the application of knowledge acquired over time.

FOX's medical procedural *House* provides an excellent example: while the occasional viewer will be able to follow the central, stand-alone narrative that provides the focus for each episode, dedicated viewers experience an additional level of satisfaction by speculating on the significance and long-term implications of the subtle and evolving interpersonal relationships on the program. Occasional viewers will have no trouble sensing that there is some sort of sexual tension between Doctors House and Cameron; dedicated viewers will know why, when it began, and how it shades the significance of much of their dialogue.

3.1.3. Complex Narrative

While most television programs allow different opportunities for viewer mastery, complex 'puzzle' narratives such as *Lost* and *Twin Peaks* all but demand them, challenging viewers to engage in an active process of deciphering clues, ignoring red herrings, and putting together events in order to "solve" the show. In such cases, mastery becomes a conscious pleasure, with the show's producers structuring the television

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[8] See the discussion of narrative complexity in American television in Chapter 2, Section 1 (Program Qualities).

program itself as a complex system that viewers must master in order to comprehend. In such television series, as Jenkins has observed of *Twin Peaks*, "almost everything can count as a clue," and that the text was so blatant in its complexity that viewers felt certain "no matter how closely they looked, whatever they found there was not only intentional but part of the narrative master plan, pertinent or even vital to understanding textual secrets."[9]

As a result, every aspect of a complex narrative – as well as any extensions or ancillaries produced in relation to the narrative – is subject to analysis and speculation, leading the most committed viewers to parse each episode of shows like *Twin Peaks* on a frame-by-frame basis in search of clues and hidden meaning. The desire to master the challenges issued by such programs can also direct viewers outwards in search of intertextual and extratextual references that might offer clues.

3.2. Mastering Textual Relationships

Before moving on to the four additional forms of mastery detailed below, it is necessary to return to Fiske's original definition of intertextuality, introduced earlier, which holds that intertextual links "do not take the form of specific allusions from one text to another," and insists that "there is no need for readers to be familiar with specific or the same texts to read intertextually."[10] Instead, according to Fiske, such specific references would be described as allusions. Fiske's definition then posits two types of intertextual references: "horizontal intertextuality," which refers to the relationship "between primary texts that are more or less explicitly linked," and "vertical intertextuality", which refers to the relationship between a text (in this case, a television program or series) and "other texts of a different type that refer explicitly to it."[11]

While I understand the reasoning behind Fiske's distinctions, which are built around his (now somewhat outdated) three-tiered model of textuality, I disagree with his distinction between explicit references (allusions) and suggestive references (intertextuality). In large part, this is because the shift to position television texts at the center of large networks of ancillary content and extensions have made it increasingly difficult to draw a line between Fiske's primary, secondary and tertiary identifiers.

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[9] Jenkins, H. ""Do You Enjoy Making The Rest Of Us Feel Stupid?"" *Full of Secrets*, ed. Lavery. 1995, 56-57.
[10] Fiske. 108.
[11] Ibid. *Television Culture.*

As such, I believe that what Fiske described as horizontal intertextuality – the relationship between two explicitly linked texts – can be more accurately described as "horizontal intratextuality," since it refers to the link between two related textual units. Thus, horizontal intratextuality occurs when, for example, one episode of a television program references another episode of the same program. This revised definition also allows us to articulate a relationship that Fiske hadn't specifically accounted for – the link between a television program and a second text developed (often across media) to extend the narrative events or settings of the first – as "vertical intratextuality."

In turn, what Fiske described as vertical intertextuality – the relationship between a text and something that has been written about that text – can be more accurately described as "extratextuality." Thus, an extratextual relationship describes the link between, for example, a television program and a review of that program, or an interview with a performer from the program's cast.

Finally, this still leaves the question of intertextuality, which I use to describe the relationship linking any two or more distinct texts or bodies of knowledge. Thus, when an episode of one television program makes an explicit or implicit reference to another television program, a movie, a book, or current events, all of these constitute intertextual relationships – that is, links between two or more otherwise unrelated texts.

These revised definitions serve as the basis for the four remaining forms of mastery discussed here.

3.2.1. Horizontal Intratextuality

Other opportunities for mastery require an exceptional degree of familiarity with (and recall of) the nuances and details of previous episodes. Neither *The Simpsons* nor *Seinfeld* featured serialized or continuous narratives, or, for that matter, any real narrative progression whatsoever. Bart Simpson has always been and will forever be in Ms. Krabapple's fourth grade class, and whether Jerry and Elaine happen to be dating or not in any given episode, the fundamental relationship between them always remains the same. As such, each series is fundamentally episodic: individual episodes can be watched in any order, require no greater context or understanding, and assume no previous knowledge of the program.

At the same time, however, both of these programs are infamous for their casual violations of the rules of episodic television. Both *The Simpsons* and *Seinfeld* frequently reward long-term viewers by

inserting throwaway one-liners that make sense only in the greater context of the entire series, or making passing reference to incidents from episodes that aired months or years earlier. Thus, while the episodes can be watched in any order, attentive, sequential viewing offers committed fans an additional layer of understanding.

3.2.2. Intertextuality

Another opportunity to experience mastery arises in shows that include frequent intertextual references. One might argue that this is the dominant mode available for viewers interested in mastering fundamentally intertextual programs like *The Simpsons*, which makes frequent references to other texts, series, and bodies of knowledge, in forms ranging from homage to allusion to satire. To "fully appreciate" and grasp the show, the text, viewers must look outside of the text itself for context and relevant material.

3.2.3. Vertical Intratextuality

As the transmedia narrative extensions described in the previous chapter become more common, it may prove useful to differentiate between textual mastery, which relies solely upon familiarity with the core text, and macrotextual mastery; which would provide additional opportunities for mastery to viewers familiar with a program's various extensions. Since mastery often functions as a reward for dedicated media consumers, it seems likely that we will see a greater use of this approach in the coming years, as television producers begin to recognize the appeal of mastery, and to build-in "incentives" that encourage consumers to seek out various promotional and monetized touchpoints.

3.2.4. Extratextuality

Finally, it is also possible to master a television program by moving outside of its narrative or diegetic framework to evaluate it as a commercial and industrial product. Such efforts draw upon the extratextual touchpoints described in the previous chapter – specifically, industrial and celebrity information – to help interpret a show's narrative decisions in non-narrative terms.

When drawing upon production information, such as knowledge of shooting locations, casting decisions and commercial considerations, viewers may find extratextual insight that explains a show's narrative decisions and progression in non-narrative terms (e.g., as a function of interpersonal on-set relationships, scheduling conflicts, production logistics, etc.) A recent example of this would be the sudden disappearance of a character named Audrey Raines during the sixth season of FOX's *24*: while uninformed viewers of the program might conclude that her character had disappeared to make room for new characters, many of the program's more dedicated viewers suspected that her absence was due to her casting as a lead on a new ABC drama called *The Nine* – a conclusion that would be reinforced by her character's return to *24* after *The Nine*'s mid-season cancellation.

Similarly, a viewer's "personal" knowledge of an actor's life and persona off-screen may inform their evaluation or reading of that actor's performance within the show. For example, the narrative decision to introduce a romantic relationship between Doctors Chase and Cameron during the third season of FOX's *House* takes on additional significance for viewers who know that the actors performing those roles began dating and then got engaged at around the same time that those episodes were in production.

In all of these cases, "mastering" a program can be thought of as a meaningful form of engagement with content, since it creates a relationship within which the viewer brings an active desire to bear when interacting with various components of the expanded television text, and provides an incentive for the viewer to be both attentive and consistent when following the show.

It is also worth emphasizing that some forms of mastery – particularly the form described above as episodic narrative – are widely accessible, and can quickly provide an incentive for new viewers to continue watching a program in the future. Other forms, such as mastery of serial and complex narratives, provide greater rewards over a longer period, and require more perpetual engagement.

4. *Being There* (The Logic of Immersion)

"Immersion" describes a mode of engagement that satisfies the viewer's imaginative or emotional desires to be "surrounded" or "subsumed" by a television program. In *Hamlet on the Holodeck,* Murray devotes an entire chapter to immersion, and offers this explanation for the concept:

> *Immersion* is a metaphorical term derived from the physical experience of being submerged in water. We week the same feeling from a psychologically immersive experience that we do from a plunge in the ocean of swimming pool: the sensation of being surrounded by a completely other reality, as different as water is from air, that takes over all of our attention, our whole perceptual apparatus.[12]

While most of the existing work in media and fan studies concerning immersion focuses on imaginative engagement, and describes the practice of immersing oneself in the diegetic world or narrative depicted in a program, Murray's description applies equally well to the process of emotional engagement that some viewers develop through immersion in the extratextual materials and social spaces surrounding a text. These practices can be described as textual and extratextual immersion, respectively.

Existing literature proposes a number of possible motives for desiring immersion, ranging from the wish to escape "the banality of everyday existence"[13] to a desire to participate in new and novel experiences. Lee and Lee found that viewers seeking immersion often expressed the desire to "[be] in places, times and situations that one would never be in, doing things one would never do, and meeting people one will never meet."[14]   To avoid pathologizing viewer behavior, however, this discussion will not attempt to assess the specific motives that compel viewers to seek immersion. Instead, the following discussion describes the possible forms of immersion that viewers may pursue, and the range of practices used to do so.

4.1. Textual Immersion

Within media and fan studies, most existing literature related to immersion is focused specifically on textual immersion, a mode of engagement that reflects the viewer's desire to be "lost within" and "surrounded by" a text, to become completely familiar with its texture and details, and to "believe" in the text's narrative world as a real, inhabitable space. While television is not the only medium that allows for textual immersion, the nature of serialized television narratives can provide viewers with particularly vivid and detailed texts within which to become immersed.

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[12] Murray. 98.
[13] Christopher Lasch (1979/1991: 21), as cited in Sandvoss, C. *Fans: The Mirror of Consumption.* 2005..
[14] Lee and Lee. "How and Why People Watch TV: Implications for the Future of Interactive Television," 15.

In large part, this potential for textual immersion in television's fictional worlds results from the increasingly common practice of world building. As Matt Hills has noted, many of the most popular cult texts allow for viewer immersion through:

> The creation of a vast and detailed narrative space, only a fraction of which is ever directly seen or encountered within the text, but which nevertheless appears to operate according to principles of internal logic and extension.[15]

The introduction and gradual proliferation of these self-contained fictional worlds in popular entertainment embodies Murray's observation that new media technologies allow creators to develop rich, immersive worlds that dominate the viewer's "entire perceptual apparatus." Furthermore, as Gwenllian-Jones has indicated, television's power to create immersive worlds is also aided by the fact that "television series usually consist of scores of episodes that together constitute a hundred or more screen hours and that are played out across several years of production and distribution," [16] providing an enormous creative canvas.

Building upon Murray's work, Gwenllian-Jones has also observed that viewers seeking immersion often invest tremendous effort in developing an "encyclopedic" level of knowledge about the diegetic worlds featured in their favorite programs. In order to do so, these viewers demonstrate an active desire to acquire and consume the sorts of textual extensions described in the previous chapter. More specifically, viewers seeking immersion will draw upon narrative extensions, which provide additional details, diegetic extensions, which allow them to infer details first-hand, and relevant informational content, which may flesh out the details of the fictional world to an extent far beyond what is required for the narrative events and plots featured in the show. While such content extensions have often been developed around "cult" television programs (which tend to unfold in unfamiliar times, places, and worlds), an increasing number of mainstream television properties are now experimenting with touchpoints that enable greater viewer immersion. Thus, as the definition of the "television text" is expanded to include the range of additional

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[15] Hills. 137. While Hills' description of this practice (which he refers to as *hyperdiegesis*) is used to describe one of the defining appeals of "cult" television programming, it is increasingly relevant to mainstream content as well. If cult television programs are defined as those that attract a cult-like following of dedicated fans, it is worth noting that the designation of 'fan,' in turn, might simply describe a viewer who seeks deep, perpetual engagement with a television text. Thus, as suggested at the beginning of this chapter, television's gradual transformation into an "engagement medium" also entails the mainstream viewer's transformation into a fan, or something that resembles one.

[16] Gwenllian-Jones. 87.

content, activities and opportunities for engagement described in the previous chapter, the immersive potential of television's hyperdiegetic spaces becomes even greater.

The desire to engage with television's immersive worlds on a meaningful level also creates a market for experiential activities. In his exploration of role-playing games, Daniel Mackay has observed that most forms of serialized entertainment now contribute to the cultivation of what he describes as the *imaginary entertainment environment*:

> fictional settings that change over time as if they were real places and that are published in a variety of mediums (e.g. novels, films, role playing games, etc), each of them in communication with the others as they contribute toward the growth, history, and status of the setting.[17]

In effect, Mackay's formulation of the imaginary entertainment environment expands Hills' concept of hyperdiegesis to apply to multiplatform properties and transmedia narratives, and suggests that each opportunity for audience engagement ("novels, films, games, etc") can be understood as an "interface" through which a viewer-participant can pursue immersion.

Building upon this framework, Lancaster devoted an entire volume to describing and analyzing the different experiential and immersive opportunities developed around *Babylon 5*, a list that included role-playing games (*The Babylon Project*), strategy games (*Babylon 5 Wars*) and performative re-enactments (the *Babylon 5* collectible card game)[18]. Similar commercial offerings have been produced and marketed in relation to a great number of television programs which establish rich diegetic spaces, including *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, *Star Trek*, *Doctor Who*, *Firefly*, *Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles* and, as discussed in the next chapter, *Lost*.

4.2. Extratextual Immersion

Far less has been written about the potential for *extratextual immersion*, a mode of engagement that reflects the viewer's desire to experience a show's production process, and to be involved in (or, failing that, intimately familiar with) the people, places, practices and details that are generally available only to the

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[17] Mackay, D. *The Fantasy Role-Playing Game: A New Performing Art.* 2001, 29.
[18] Lancaster.

(relatively) small group of individuals who participate in the show's production. In many cases, viewers who pursue extratextual immersion demonstrate a strong desire to interact with, and be acknowledged by, a program's "celebrities."

In the past decade, extratextual information has evolved to serve multiple purposes, and in particular, has been used to generate both audience interest (e.g., through interviews, and public appearances) and additional revenue (e.g., DVD bonus materials, fan magazines). As a result, the audience has grown more conscious of television content's dual-role as both entertainment commodity and professional product.

Production "bloopers," episode commentaries and "making-of" featurettes are among the most common forms of extratextual content. Each of these ostensibly has a different appeal: bloopers, to humanize the performers in the midst of their professional settings; commentaries, to give the viewer some private insight into what celebrities were thinking during production, or even during the moment of performance shown on screen; featurettes, to carefully replace the illusion that a television's diegetic world is real by exposing the "more realistic" process by which the diegetic illusion is accomplished. Yet despite their apparent differences in focus, all three types of content serve a similar function: by "pulling back the curtain" and giving viewers some insight – however constructed it might be – into the personalities, preferences and lives of the various celebrities involved in a show's production, extratextual materials give the illusion of access.

Over time, viewers who consume large quantities of extratextual content may come to feel that they 'know' a show's celebrities, and feel – if only on a subconscious level – that they have become part of an insider community. In many cases, of course, the extratextual materials available to viewers may be as fictional as the television programs they relate to, with a show's participants putting on a different performance – as "themselves" – for the audience. Nevertheless, such material helps establish life "behind the scenes" as a universe that viewers can immerse themselves in and aspire to enter.

Furthermore, a growing number of opportunities for *vertical* social interaction – those that allow a limited degree of direct contact between viewers and celebrities – are often designed to capitalize on the desire for extratextual immersion and privileged connection. While most vertical interactions seem unlikely to have a lasting impact on their celebrity participants, the experience of direct interaction with a show's celebrities can be a powerful and prized moment for viewers.

In practice, the desire for extratextual immersion can appear very similar to the desire for extratextual mastery, since both modes of engagement compel the viewer to acquire and internalize as much extratextual information as possible. The difference, then, is in how this information is applied. When extratextual knowledge is used to deconstruct and interpret the show's narrative, the information is serving the intellectual desire to master the text; when this knowledge is used to help the viewer feel "closer" to the show and it's participants, or to enable a sense of parasocial familiarity, belonging, or possession, it is helping create an experience of immersion.

5. *We Are What We Watch* (The Logic of Identification)

Finally, the U & G tradition suggests that one of the most powerful and enduring aspects of viewer engagement is television's role in "identification." As a term, identification describes the range of ways in which engagement with television content may both help viewers to formulate and/or reaffirm their personal identities (self-identification) and allow them to express and signal those self-perceived identities to others (social identification).

5.1. Self Identification

According to McQuail, work in U & G suggests that a viewer's engagement with media content can influence a viewer's self-perception by (1) providing reinforcement for personal values; (2) offering new models of behavior; (3) encouraging viewers to identify themselves with media figures; and (4) offering viewers insight into their own personalities, values and identities. In addition, Russell et al have also articulated a number of practices that describe the various ways in which a television program can contribute to a viewer's self-perception and identity. These practices include "modeling" (relating one's own life to that of a character), "fashioning" (being influenced by a character's appearance), and "aspiration" (the desire to be on the show, akin to the desire for extratextual immersion, or "in" the show, akin to the desire for textual immersion).

Validation. A somewhat less pathologizing interpretation of these practices is that viewers might demonstrate these particular behaviors because they believe that their favorite television characters reflect or

embody traits that they perceive or value in themselves. Thus, as McQuail has suggested, viewers might demonstrate deeper engagement with shows that seem to re-affirm or validate the viewer's online lifestyle, behavior and decisions.

Emancipation. In his work on role-playing games, Mackay has proposed that the experience of assuming and acting out roles offers a form of "emancipation," and explains that RPG players often assume new identities and relate to their characters in order to free themselves from existing social bonds.[19] A similar process of experimentation may help explain a practice that Russell and Puto have described as "imitation," wherein a viewer imitates the behavior or mannerisms of a television character.

5.2. Social Identification

The desire to signal one's personal preferences and affiliations to others may also help explain the motives of viewers who acquire branded products and collectible merchandise. As Lancaster has suggested:

> These different objects become a means for people to enact fantasy, to panoptically display oneself, which, according to Kirshenblatt-Gimblett, is a way "to show with respect to others what one would not reveal about oneself — one's body, person and life."[20]

Thus, while the practices of wearing branded apparel and displaying branded merchandise may function (as suggested earlier in this chapter) to further a viewer's sense of textual immersion, the same practices might also represent a form of signaling one's affiliation with a television text, or with themes, characters and values identified with that text.

The five logics of engagement discussed in this chapter, along with the framework for developing the 'expanded television text' discussed in chapter two, point to a possible route forward for television within an experience economy. Television's future in a cluttered, fragmented media space seems to hinge on its ability to transform itself in response to new modes of use, rather than the industry's ongoing attempts to

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[19] Mackay. 28.

[20] Lancaster. 78.

reformulate audience practices by framing them in the language of traditional aggregation-based advertising models.

The transition to this form of television, however, is not an easy one to make; it requires substantial and significant changes at many levels, from production and writing to budget allocation and promotional spending. The next chapter examines the way these changes are beginning to take place through a detailed examination of ABC's primetime drama *Lost,* arguing that *Lost* represents a television text caught in the midst of the medium's gradual transition. On one level, the show has been developed and marketed as a ground-breaking demonstration of the various methods by which television can drive cross-platform experiences and encourage viewer engagement, since the program utilizes a rich network of content, information, products, activities and experiences to create and perpetuate audience engagement. Yet *Lost* also operates within a system that does not yet fully understand the value of engagement beyond its potential to preserve television's traditional advertiser-supported business model, and that fails to take advantage of the new business practices available to *Lost.* As such, the show's various innovations and extensions are sometimes not fully realized as new opportunities but as methods for generating an audience for "the mother ship": viewers who will watch the show during broadcast, and thus ensure *Lost's* continued viability as "old" television.

As such, *Lost* offers both a tantalizing glimpse of television's future, and the possibilities that might arise for audience engagement with entertainment programming, but also an agonizing reminder of television's current limitations and restrictive business models.

CHAPTER 4

Lost At Television's Crossroads

When Lost premiered on September 22, 2004, the show appeared to be a fictional version of *Survivor*: a plane (Oceanic 815) traveling from Sydney to Los Angeles crashes on a desert island in an unknown location, leaving 48 survivors stranded and with no apparent means of calling for help.[1] As both the viewers and the survivors quickly learn, however, *Lost* was attempting something far more complicated: within the first six episodes, over a dozen significant narrative mysteries are introduced, ranging from an unseen monster that appears to be stalking the island to the discovery of a radio transmission that has been sending an uninterrupted distress signal from the island for sixteen years. At the same time, the show also established a distinct narrative formula, with each episode centered on one of the survivors, whose personal histories are slowly revealed through a series of flashbacks interspersed with the "real-time" events of life on the island.

1. *Lost* as Complex Television

As a result, *Lost* might be set on a tropical island, but is in fact a show about mysteries. Both Steven Johnson and Jason Mittell have singled *Lost* out as one of the most complex (and as such, one of the most satisfying) narratives ever featured on broadcast television.[2] According to Johnson, "the genius of *Lost* is that its mysteries are fractal; at every scale—from the macro to the micro—the series delivers a constant payload of confusion." This approach, which rewards careful and attentive viewing, makes *Lost* an ideal example of the recent shift in television programming, from the older, more accessible model of "Least Objectionable Programming" toward the emerging, more demanding model that Johnson has described as "Most Repeatable Programming."

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[1] That *Lost* reflects the basic premise of *Survivor* is not a coincidence: when the show was first pitched within ABC, it was conceptualized as a fictional version of the popular reality show.

[2] Johnson, S. "What's going on? Don't ask me, I'm lost..." *The Times Online*. 2 September 2005.. Mittell, J. "The Loss of Value (Or the Value of *Lost*), Part Two," *FlowTV* 2.10 (2005)..

Representing an aggressive departure from Postman's assessment that television's success is predicated upon its adherence to the twin commandments of "Thou shalt have no prerequisites" and "Thou shalt induce no perplexity,"[3] *Lost* offers just the opposite: a show that is successful because it is dense enough to ensure not only viewers tune in for the following episode, but take it upon themselves to seek out and watch the *previous* episodes. In fact, in the series' later episodes, it is often literally impossible to understand the narrative action without first viewing (or reviewing) several earlier episodes.

Complexity Optional. At the same time, *Lost* has been designed to be accessible to the widest possible audience of viewers. In particular, the show's producers have emphasized the presence of a diverse ensemble cast, with each episode of the show turning the spotlight to a different character. According to showrunner Damon Lindelof, "what makes it accessible to a wider audience is that there is a character on the show who is like you,"[4] — whether that character is the Korean businessman Jin, who does not speak English; the estranged single father Michael, who is trying to build a long overdue relationship with his son Walt; pregnant mother Claire, who has been abandoned by her child's father; or one of the half-dozen characters on the show dealing with parental issues.

Lost is also intended to operate on multiple levels, allowing for different types of audience engagement with the show's narrative. Co Executive-Producer Carlton Cuse frequently likens the experience of watching *Lost* to that of attending a baseball game, explaining:

> if you don't know anything about baseball, you can watch people hit the ball and run and score runs. If you're really into baseball, you can look at a particular pitching match-up, and you know about a particular pitcher, and what he throws to a certain batter, and you can somehow appreciate the game on a much deeper level because you understand the participants.[5]

The result, at least in theory, is that *Lost* functions as different shows for different viewers. Some might watch the show to discover answers to the show's cryptic central questions (e.g. "Where -- and what – is the Island? Why are all of the passengers here? Is it fate or coincidence? What is the monster roaming the island, and who controls it? Who are the mysterious 'Others' roaming the island, and what are their intentions?") Other viewers may focus on the more accessible human aspects of the narrative, such as the

[3] POSTMAN, 147
[4] Korbelik, J. "Popular 'Lost' is a cultural phenomenon." *The Lincoln Journal Star*. 19 February 2006.
[5] Cuse, C. "The Official Lost Podcast: November 14, 2005."

protracted love triangle between Jack, Kate and Sawyer, or the troubled marriage of Jin and Sun. Still others may be interested in the larger undercurrents and thematic motifs of the show, such as the struggle between science and religion, or the basic premise of surviving on a tropical island in the wake of a horrific crash landing. Thus, while the show often prioritizes some of these interests over others, it is ultimately intended to cater to all of them – a strategy that the showrunners believe is responsible for the show's unusual ability to attract both "cult" and mainstream audiences on a regular basis.

2. *Lost* as Interactive Television

Just as *Twin Peaks* represented one of the first television shows that could not be "completely" understood without access to a VCR (and, for many viewers, participation in Usenet discussion groups), *Lost* represents a new generation of "convergence-era" television texts: programs with narratives complex enough to require repeat viewing and careful analysis, whether on DVR, DVD, or the Internet. Yet, like *Twin Peaks*, *Lost* is often described as a more "interactive" form of television, due to the unusual nature of the relationship between the show's creative team (i.e. writers and producers) and the audience.

That relationship, as it turns out, bears a striking resemblance to the relationship between the producers and fans of *Lost*'s less fictional predecessor *Survivor*, as detailed in Jenkins' *Convergence Culture*. Writing about *Survivor* fan communities as examples of "collective intelligence," Jenkins proposed that *Survivor* was "television for the Internet age—designed to be discussed, debated, predicted and critiqued."[6] More interesting still was his observation that many of *Survivor*'s most actively engaged viewers interpreted the show as an aggressive competition not only between the show's featured contestants, but also between the viewers (who hoped to uncover the identity of each season's winner before the results aired on television) and the show's producer (who hoped to keep that identity secret). Describing how members of the show's spoiler community often collaborate to uncover and draw conclusions from "hidden" information, such as satellite photos of locations where the current season of *Survivor* had been recorded, Jenkins suggested that

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[6] Jenkins. 25.

Survivor fans had a great deal in common with the interpretive communities that had formed more than a decade earlier in Usenet groups to "solve" the mysteries of *Twin Peaks*.

As both a literal and spiritual hybrid of *Survivor* and *Twin Peaks*, it should come as no surprise that *Lost* audiences have inherited the interactive legacies of both programs.

Like the *Survivor* spoilers, *Lost* fans have turned to a wide range of unexpected (and often extratextual) resources in hopes of better predicting the answers to *Lost*'s innumerable mysteries. During the second season, the parallels to Jenkins' example became unavoidable, when participants in several *Lost* communities correctly anticipated that two characters were going to die in an upcoming episode, based on their analysis of unauthorized production photos that showed two grave-sized holes on one of the Hawaiian beaches where the program is shot. Furthermore, when script pages used for casting auditions were leaked before the show's third season, *Lost*'s producers followed *Survivor*'s example and "leaked" their own false spoiler (or "foiler") information to fan communities.

As with *Twin Peaks*, however, the competition between fans and producers also unfolds in a more authorized and sanctioned format, with program viewers collaborating to formulate theories that "solve" *Lost*'s various mysteries by drawing upon a wide range of specialized knowledge (e.g., translation of ancient Egyptian hieroglyphics, application of experimental quantum physics, etc). Unlike *Twin Peaks*, however, *Lost*'s producers are more than willing to participate in a "giant cat and mouse game" with their fans, and are infamous for seeding "easter eggs" and hidden clues in almost every episode of the series.

Openly embracing its partial status as a cult television program for the post-broadcast era, *Lost* is designed to encourage and reward the level of microscopic analysis that DVR, DVD and high-resolution streaming video files make possible. In fact, while the most devoted *Twin Peaks* fans used VCRs to scrutinize each episode of that program on a frame-by-frame basis in hopes of uncovering clues, *Lost*'s producers go several steps farther and actively anticipate such behavior. James Poniewozik offers one well-known example of how *Lost*'s producers actively encourage this sort of viewing, describing a moment during an episode in the show's second season where:

> Eko (Adewale Akinnuoye-Agbaje), a former Nigerian drug lord, has a religious epiphany when he

encounters the smoke monster in the jungle. Viewers who TiVoed the scene and played it in slow motion
saw a series of images in the cloud: Eko's dead brother, a man Eko killed, a crucifix. The images flash by in
fractions of a second. A casual viewer would not have noticed them at all. [7]

As a result, Poniewozik suggests, *Lost* functions on several possible levels at once: viewers can opt for a more traditional role, which allows them to "sit back and enjoy the story," or a more active and engaged role, treating the program "as if it were an adventure-puzzle game like *Dungeons & Dragons* or *Myst*." [8]

And indeed, many academics, critics and fans agree with Jennifer Buckendorff's assessment that "*Lost* is the first television program that owes its soul to video games,"[9] and that – like many video games – *Lost* attracts both "casual" and "hardcore" viewers. In his earlier writing on *Twin Peaks*, Jenkins describes the aspects of the program that lent it a game-like quality:

> The narrative abounded with cryptic messages, codes, and chess problems, riddles and conundrums,
> dreams, visions, clues, secret passages and locked boxes, shadowy figures peering through dark windows and
> secondary narratives appearing in the televised soap (*Invitation to Love*) that forms a backdrop to the first
> season's action.

Dan Hill's recent assessment of *Lost* as the best available example of a complex, engaging multiplatform text made an almost identical claim, noting that

> *Lost* episodes are famously laden with arcana to pore over, deconstruct and even construct in the first place,
> such is the collective-imagination-run-wild of the show's fans. For instance, [one fan site] supplies
> transcripts of the eery 'whispers'; character names are opportunities for anagrams ('Ethan Rom' = 'Other
> Man'); there are numbers, codes everywhere; hieroglyphics; mystical allusions; references to philosophy
> (Locke, Rousseau); the constant casual appearance of literary works etc.[10]

As such, *Lost* (as Jenkins wrote of *Twin Peaks*) "invite[s] the viewer's participation as a minimal condition for comprehending the narrative, and even closer consideration if one…hopes to solve the compelling narrative hook."[11] But while *Twin Peaks* hung on a single infamous narrative hook ("Who killed Laura Palmer?"), *Lost* swings from dozens, introducing and advancing new narrative hooks during each episode, with many of the largest (e.g., "What is the island?") poised to last for the majority of the show's six

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[7] Poniewozik, J. "Why The Future of Television is Lost." *Time.* 2006.

[8] Ibid.

[9] Buckendorff, J. "Fans play TV series "Lost" like an interactive video game." *The Seattle Times*. 10 January 2006.

[10] Hill, D. "Why *Lost* is genuinely new media." *City of Sound*. 27 March 2006.

[11] Jenkins.

season run. This gives *Lost* a distinct advantage that *Twin Peaks* didn't have, in that it can provide the satisfaction of narrative closure by resolving some of its mysteries, while still holding viewers with the promise that it will eventually "explain everything."

3. *Lost* as Expanded Television

While *Lost* has earned its reputation as an exemplar of "intelligent television" and a trendsetter in the shift to cross-platform content distribution, what makes the show remarkable for the purposes of this thesis is its construction not just as a television show, but also as an ideal example of the "expanded television text" described in Chapter 2. With *Lost*, the television show itself is just the most prominent point of entry into a much larger entertainment experience that utilizes a wide range of textual extensions, branded products, activities and other touchpoints which allow viewers to perpetually engage with the show at multiple levels. Before examining how the shows various touchpoints enable and cater to different logics of engagement, it is helpful to have a basic sense of the scope of the *Lost* empire.

While co-showrunner Cuse stated in a recent presentation that *Lost* has 37 ancillary components in addition to the show (with some as yet unannounced) [12], an exhaustive list of the individual touchpoints that already make up *Lost*'s "official" expanded text could include well over 50 items.

3.1. Expanded Access

Viewers seeking expanded access to episodes of *Lost* have been well served. Like most modern television programming, each season of the show has been released on DVD during the break between seasons, both enabling new viewers to catch up with the show's narrative before the next season premiere, and enabling the show's most dedicated viewers to review and scrutinize the previous season for clues and insights. However, given *Lost*'s complex narrative structure, it comes as no surprise that the series has also been at the forefront of recent industrial efforts to provide audiences with more immediate, expanded access

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[12] Gough, P J. "'Lost' won't end 'with a blackout'." *The Hollywood Reporter*. 14 June 2007.

to television content. When Apple introduced the video-enabled iPod and the iTunes Video Store on October 12, 2005, *Lost* (along with *Desperate Housewives* and a few others) was the first program available for sale, and quickly established itself as the service's best-selling television series.[13] As I have written elsewhere, the introduction of the iTunes real-time download model had particularly significant implications for complex programs such as *Lost*, since viewers who missed one or more episodes would now be able to catch up with on-air narrative developments at any point in the season, rather than waiting for the show's DVD release several months after the season finale.[14]

Access to recent episodes of *Lost* became even more ubiquitous on April 30, 2006, when ABC launched a trial of their broadband video initiative, which allowed American viewers to stream recent episodes of the network's most popular shows, with three one-minute breaks during each hour-long episode. While no *Lost*-specific numbers are available, ABC did report that 5.7 million episodes were streamed during the two-month trial, and were satisfied enough with the public response to expand the service to offer additional programs when the fall television season began in October 2006. Most recently, ABC's streaming service was updated on July 24, 2007 to offer selected programs – including *Lost* – in high-definition (1280 x 720) format.

In addition, an announcement in May 2007 revealed that ABC had also reached a deal to stream full-length on-demand episodes of *Lost* to the mobile phones of Sprint subscribers, while a series of original *Lost* mobisodes are expected to debut as a Verizon exclusive sometime in the fall.

While ABC's experiments with cross-platform distribution and content sales do not alter or extend the core *Lost* franchise, the ability for media consumers to access the program and related content via the Internet, iPods, mobile phones and other channels is a critical aspect of *Lost*'s construction as "engagement television." As *Publish* Magazine observed in May 2006:

> Being platform-agnostic allows *Lost* to compete for your time no matter where you are or what you're
> doing. ABC knows you can't maintain a business with just television. Or just video. You need to be

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[13] While Apple does not make download and purchase data available to the public, *Lost* quickly rose to the top of the "100 Most Downloaded Television Shows" chart. Since the show's iTunes debut in October 2005, each new episode of the series has placed in the "Top 5" most downloaded shows during the week following the episode's release, with *Lost* often holding multiple slots in the "Top 10."

[14] Askwith, I. "TV You'll Want To Pay For: How $2 Downloads Can Revive Network Television." *Slate.com*. 1 November 2005.

everywhere. In being everywhere, you let your product, whatever it may be, have a social life.[15]

3.2. Repackaged Content

As one of the most demanding shows in a new generation of "complex" television programming, *Lost* can often seem incomprehensible to new and occasional viewers: as one reporter noted in a review of *Lost*'s third season premiere, "the show is layered with so many references, clues, and inside nods that it seems to be daring neophytes to buy the DVDs."[16] While purchasing the DVDs (or downloading individual episodes) provides one solution, however, repackaged content touchpoints provide another. Accordingly, ABC has invested tremendous effort in developing and maintaining informational resources that re-organize, streamline and pre-process *Lost*'s most important narrative threads, making them accessible even to viewers who have not been watching since the show began. Thus, in addition to the standard range of repackaged content (web-based episode guides and summaries, character descriptions and histories, etc), *Lost* offered more elaborate and polished forms of repackaging.

Clip Shows. Prior to *Lost*'s debut in 2003, several of television's more complex programs (e.g. *24, Alias*) had incorporated short (30-second) recap sequences at the beginning of each episode, providing reminders of the most essential details from previous episodes. For *Lost*, however, such brief overviews could do little more than remind viewers who had seen the previous episodes of the most important details that might have slipped past them. In order to make the show accessible to new viewers, a more drastic approach was required, and *Lost* emerged as one of the first shows to produce "recap specials" at regular intervals. At least twice each season, *Lost* has aired special feature-length shows that combine hundreds of short clips from previous episodes into well-organized, smoothly narrated montage sequences summarizing all of the most important details new viewers need in order to begin watching the program.

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[15] Bryant, S. "Why ABC's 'Lost' Is The Future of Online Media." *Publish*. 4 May 2006.
[16] Weiss, J. "The Beauty Is In The Complexity: Not Surprisingly, More Questions, Few 'Lost' Clues," *The Boston Globe.* 2006.

Video Clips. In addition, many of the most innovative features provided on *Lost*'s official website are designed to help new viewers comprehend the show. During the show's third season, ABC introduced a rotating series of videos entitled *Lost: Back Stories*, each consisting of nothing more than a re-edited sequence compiling a given character's flashback sequences from multiple episodes into a single, chronological film.

Interactive Resources. Another feature on the website, entitled *Lost Connections*, allows visitors to explore a detailed interactive network diagram explaining the pre-island connections that have been revealed between 20 of the show's main characters. Clicking on a character's portrait brings them to the center of the diagram, with connected characters organized around the character in a circle; moving the mouse over one of these connected characters reveals a small block of text describing the nature of the connection, as well as a "Play" icon that loads and plays the relevant video clip from the television program.

The development of such elaborate repackaged content touchpoints ultimately serves two distinct purposes. The more basic forms of repackaged content, such as episode guides and character descriptions, are of particular use both to viewers looking to join the show (letting them familiarize themselves with relevant details and plot points) and for viewers who miss the occasional episode, and simply need a quick overview of what happened (though I'm inclined to suggest that if a viewer would rather read a brief synopsis of main points than devote time to watching a program, that preference in and of itself suggests a lack of desire to engage with the program.) Meanwhile, for more invested viewers *Lost*'s repackaged content functions not as an alternative to viewing a show, but as a supplement to the viewing experience, a resource for gaining comprehension and mastery, and a tool for prolonging the pleasurable experience of engaging with and thinking about the program's content.

3.3. Textual Extensions

While *Lost*'s core narrative has unfolded entirely within the program episodes, the show's producers have also experimented with several textual extensions. *Lost*'s writers have often commented that the greatest challenge in writing episodes of the program is the need to strike a balance that serves the needs of several different types of viewers: although some shows focus more on advancing the show's long-term mysteries

(e.g. "What is the island?"), and others emphasize the more accessible and immediate aspects of the narrative (e.g. "Is Kate going to choose Jack or Sawyer?"), most episodes attempt to give equal attention to each. Consistent with television's traditional advertiser-supported imperative, *Lost*'s commercial success still hinges on its ability to attract the largest possible audience each week.

Since "textual extensions" are targeted less at a mass audience than the show's more engaged and dedicated followers, however, *Lost*'s creative team often "offload" some of the show's more elaborate and detailed aspects into a range of experimental side projects. To date, *Lost* has offered both narrative and diegetic projects that expand *Lost*'s basic text.

3.3.1. Narrative Extensions

At present, *Lost* has released fewer narrative extensions than one might expect: while the showrunners have announced that audiences will soon gain access to a series of original mobisodes, *Lost*'s "pure" narrative extensions thus far have mainly taken the form of licensed novels.

Licensed Spin-Off Novels. At least in theory, *Lost*'s unique narrative formula (focusing on a specific character and shifting between the present action on the island and flashbacks revealing important aspects of the character's life before the crash – seems well suited for transmedia expansion. It was unsurprising, then, that the initial series of licensed novels followed this same template: each of the three novels published during the show's first season introduced and elaborated on the secret histories of a new character that had never appeared on the television program, with each novel offering a handful of cameo appearances and interactions by the show's recognizable characters.[17] The promotional copy for the first novel, *Endangered Species*, teased:

> As an environmentalist, Faith Harrington could be one of the biggest assets for the group's survival. But the events that lead her to boarding Flight 815 have left her wracked with guilt and self-doubt.

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[17] In fact, while *Lost*'s featured characters appeared in the novels only as minor players and in brief cameos, each of the three novels featured one of the most popular characters from the program – a marketing decision that probably contributed to the general perception that the novels were produced to generate revenue rather than tell stories.

As tantalizing as this might have sounded to *Lost* fans – and the poor commercial performance of the books suggests that it was not tantalizing enough – the novels themselves were considered both commercial and creative failures. It doesn't help that the novels, which, as the product of a licensing deal brokered through another department at ABC, were written without direct involvement from any of the show's creative team: series co-creator Damon Lindelof has gone on the record, telling *The New York Times* that he put one of the books down after reading a chapter and a half, thinking, "This is terrible."[18]

Yet even if the books had been well-written, the simple fact that they were written by authors with no formal connection to the series – and as such, no knowledge of how *Lost*'s central mysteries will be resolved – made their connection to the series itself almost meaningless. The most significant problem with the licensed *Lost* novels was their lack of meaningful connection to the show's larger narrative mysteries. While careful readers of the novels might recognize certain important elements from the show's core narrative, the spin-off novels did not offer any new, substantial, or useful insight or information about the show's larger narrative enigmas. As a result, the *Lost* novels ultimately came off less as an exercise in transmedia storytelling than ancillary branding.

Furthermore, readers were confronted with the uncanny sense that the events related in the novels were happening in a vacuum: while the protagonist of *Endangered Species* may have helped Locke find the backgammon set that appears in the first episode of the series, the events and dialogue of the core television show fail to make even a passing reference to her character. For all intents and purposes, outside of the confines of the novel itself, Faith Harrington never seems to have existed at all. For those members of the audience who savor *Lost*'s perpetual suggestion that all of the survivors have landed on the island together for some greater reason, and engage with the show's expanded text in hopes of uncovering hidden connections between what appear to be disparate and unrelated elements, this lack of relevance poses a real problem.[19]

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[18] Manly, L. "Running the Really Big Show: 'Lost' Inc.," *The New York Times.* 2006.
[19] On a more traditional television series, this disconnect between the licensed fiction and the events of the television series might not pose such an insurmountable problem. Novels for spy-series *Alias* were able to position themselves as isolated missions, just as the *Buffy* novels and comics mentioned in Chapter 2 were successful in developing plot points that had already been suggested or referenced in the television series itself. *Lost*, however, leaves little room for this sort of tangential narrative, for the simple reason that the show's narrative pleasure is largely derived from the show's constant insinuations that every detail is a clue, and that every question has an answer.

The Lost Video Diaries. The first public mention of original *Lost* mobisodes came in November 2005. During this initial announcement, the mobisodes – which were to be released as exclusive content for the Verizon Wireless VCAST service – were presented as an opportunity to switch focus, bringing background characters from the show to the foreground, delving into the private histories and actions of these characters just as the televised episodes did with the show's main ensemble cast. According to *The Hollywood Reporter*, the videos – collectively entitled *The Lost Video Diaries* – would:

> introduce two characters said to be stranded alongside the cast featured on the primetime version. As fans of the series know, not all of the dozens of survivors of the fictional plane crash depicted on the series get screen time. While the story lines of the pair will be new to "Lost" viewers, the events depicted in the primetime version will inform their story lines.[20]

Even more tantalizing to *Lost*'s armchair detectives was a passing comment that "a tie-in connecting broadcast and mobile versions also is being considered." This statement alone seemed to promise that *Lost*'s mobisodes would succeed where the novels had failed, by extending the core pleasure of seeking connections and deeper meanings into the show's next narrative extension.

At the time, the proposed premise for the mobisodes also seemed like a winning proposition from both creative and production standpoints: on the creative side, because it would provide an innovative platform for introducing and experimenting with additional characters, further deepening the complex mysteries and social relationships of the television series, and perhaps provide unexpected insight into the show's existing puzzles by returning to view old events from a new perspective. The decision to use minor characters had clear advantages for the show's production team, both in terms of logistics (a focus on new characters would relieve the show's main ensemble from the additional burden of starring in the mobisodes) and resources (since the unknown actors in the mobisodes would command far lower salaries for their participation than the show's featured cast).

Following this announcement, however, months passed with no further word on the mobisodes. When they finally surfaced again in May 2006, the concept had changed to utilize the show's recognizable lead characters. As EP Carlton Cuse explained,

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[20] Wallenstein, A. "'Lost' deal hatched for mobile." *The Hollywood Reporter*. 17 November 2005.

> We don't want to do the *24* version, where you're dealing with characters you've never seen and have no
> relation to the central characters. We feel if we're going to do the mobisodes, they have to feature the
> characters that are part of the world of *Lost* that you know and love.[21]

While *Lost*'s producers may have had a firm plan in mind, however, it still took almost another year

to negotiate the contracts required to allow the show's cast and writers to take part in the production of the

mobisodes – legal agreements which, according to showrunner Damon Lindelof, took almost three years to

reach. While there is still no firm date in place for the debut of the *Lost* mobisodes, on June 14, 2007,

almost 18 months after *The Hollywood Reporter* first announced the project, Cuse and Lindelof suggested

that the videos would arrive in the fall. Even more important was Cuse's assurance that

> the mobisodes, about 90 seconds each, will give the hardcore "Lost" viewer more information that they
> probably weren't going to get through the show itself. What it won't be, they said, was a mini version of
> "Lost."[22]

3.3.2. Diegetic Extensions

If *Lost* has not developed more narrative extensions, it is not for a lack of interest in transmedia

storytelling. Instead, *Lost* has invested its more serious efforts in following the diegetic precedent set by

shows like *Twin Peaks*. The result has been a series of diegetic experiments that supplement *Lost*'s narrative

and mythology in an indirect and interactive fashion, by giving the show's engaged viewers the chance to

parse diegetic materials and draw their own conclusions about what is, and what is not, important. The

most significant of *Lost*'s diegetic extensions to date have been a website, a novel and an ARG.

Oceanic Airlines Website. An initial experiment with diegetic extension, the Oceanic Airlines

website (oceanic-air.com) was developed to generate audience discussion and speculation throughout the

summer following the show's first season. Viewers scrutinizing one of the final episodes of the show's first

season caught a fleeting glimpse of the URL on screen; visitors to that URL found what appeared to be an

official corporate website for Oceanic Airlines, the fictional airline that the show's characters had been

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[21] Lee, P. "*Lost* 'Mobisodes' Feature Stars." *Sci-Fi Wire*. 23 May 2006.
[22] Gough. "'Lost' won't end 'with a blackout'."

traveling on when they crashed. At first glance, the site didn't seem like much: a small announcement indicated that all flights had been cancelled (presumably as a result of the "accident" that occurred in September 2004, and involved a missing plane), and many of the links on the page led to error messages, making it appear that the site had fallen into disarray.[23] Undeterred, viewers quickly discovered unusual comments and hints hidden in the site's source code, and uncovered additional URLs and passwords which revealed a series of easter eggs and provocative clues hidden in the various pages of the site, many of which seemed to directly support or refute several of the most popular theories being circulated in the show's online communities.

However, a bit of digging shattered the illusion that visitors were interacting with the world of the show itself: after providing the correct answers to a few simple questions about the plot of the show, visitors could sign-up for a "behind-the-scenes" newsletter from the show's production team. Even more distracting was ABC's insistence that the website, despite its diegetic pretense, feature links back to ABC's legal department setting out the official "Terms of Use" applicable to site visitors. Yet despite these cracks in the diegetic façade, the Oceanic Airlines site provoked a tremendous response from *Lost*'s audience, drawing return visitors throughout the summer, and indicated that diegetic extensions of *Lost*'s narrative universe were compelling enough to warrant further experimentation.

Bad Twin. Encouraged by the audience response to the Oceanic Airlines site, ABC and *Lost*'s producers decided to conduct a more elaborate diegetic exercise: in May 2006, following the example of *Twin Peaks* and *The Secret Diary of Laura Palmer*, ABC announced the publication of a new mystery novel, called *Bad Twin*, and explained that it was the final manuscript of Gary Troup, an author who had been aboard a flight that went missing in September 2004. The flight in question, of course, was Oceanic Flight 815, and the author (according to *Lost*'s producers) had appeared in the show's pilot episode as the unfortunate (and non-speaking) gentleman who was sucked into the still-functioning wreckage of the plane's turbine engine after the crash, causing it to explode.

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[23] In truth, of course, the broken links and minimal content were a function of the show's promotional budget: while the basic diegetic premise of the site was interesting enough to invest in, developing most of the generic content that an airline's corporate site requires would be a process of diminishing returns.

Presumably recognizing that the failure of *Lost*'s previous three novels corresponded with their lack of connection to the show, *Lost*'s writers took an extra step to ensure that viewer-readers would take *Bad Twin* seriously, and introduced the novel into the narrative events of the show's broadcast episodes. During one particularly tense confrontation, Sawyer – who is perpetually shown reading books that have turned up among the seemingly inexhaustible stores of luggage salvaged after the crash – attempts to dismiss a group of characters who have accosted him so that he can finish reading the manuscript of a murder mystery that has washed up on shore. Turning his back on the others, he gloats, "I'm about to be the first and only guy to find out who done it. I think I've got it figured out!"[24] Unfortunately, Sawyer is denied the narrative closure he is anticipating when Jack throws the manuscript of *Bad Twin* into a campfire to get Sawyer's attention.

Yet, at least as the show frames it, Sawyer's loss is the viewer's gain: for a small fee, the viewer can be "the first [if not only] guy to find out who done it." (The reader has already been assured that the novel is worth reading; in a previous episode, Hurley is also shown reading the manuscript, and comments that it is "pretty good.")

It is important to recognize *Bad Twin*'s appearance in *Lost*'s narrative sequence is not a coincidence: the episode in which the manuscript is incinerated first aired on May 3, 2006, one day after *Bad Twin* appeared in bookstores. As such, *Bad Twin*'s introduction illustrates an increasingly common phenomenon, whereby one component of an "expanded television text" functions as an advertisement for another, yet also functions as a commercial product in its own right.

While *Bad Twin* was successful in positioning itself and generating interest, however, it was less successful as a valuable and believable diegetic extension. Two particular aspects of *Bad Twin* make this failure apparent. First, the book's commercial presentation failed to uphold the diegetic pretense of the book; while the novel itself had little or nothing to do with beaches or islands, the cover design illustrated the book's title as words etched in wet sand, then added the official *Lost* logo for good measure. Second, the content of the book made no meaningful contribution to *Lost*'s larger narrative. While the novel's protagonist either references or has brief interaction with a few individuals (The Widmore Family) and

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[24] Episode 2x20 (Two *For The Road*) first aired on May 3, 2006, the day after *Bad Twin* was released in stores.

organizations (The Hanso Foundation, Oceanic Airlines) that exist within the show's diegetic frame, the novel's central narrative has no apparent connection to *Lost*'s various mysteries. In fact, the inclusion of these recognizable entities can be somewhat disconcerting, since the novel at once purports to be a fictional text, even within *Lost*'s diegetic space, yet also takes liberties with characters from within that diegetic space. Thus, as one reader observed, a similar effort would involve Stephen King featuring Donald Trump as a character in one of his novels: while it might happen, the legal ramifications would be puzzling, to say the least.

Interestingly, the most compelling narrative in *Bad Twin* was the narrative crafted around the novel itself. In particular, the book was dedicated to a minor character from the show (an airline hostess named Cindy who had been an attendant on Oceanic 815 when it crashed), and prefaced with an "Editor's Note" which revealed that the [fictional] author had recently

> found a great romance [with] Cindy Chandler, a flight attendant on Oceanic Airlines. It is to Cindy that he dedicated this book; with characteristic slyness, he even gave her a cameo role to play.[25]

This brief note encouraged readers to "read between the lines," and in the process turned an otherwise generic detective novel into a challenge: *Bad Twin* became a manuscript that might (but also might not) contain hints shedding light on some of *Lost*'s unresolved mysteries. This prospect alone made the book valuable enough to appeal to a dramatic portion of the show's audience.

On the strength of this prospect, and aided by the on-air endorsements of Sawyer and Hurley, curiosity, word-of-mouth, and a series of diegetic advertisements surrounding the book's release, *Bad Twin* attained a level of commercial success that the previous *Lost* novels had lacked: on June 11, *Bad Twin* peaked at #12 on *The New York Times* bestseller list. This suggests that when diegetic extensions are well executed, and designed with an understanding of audience expectations, such efforts can generate significant revenue. At the same time – at least according to a number of articles in the popular press – the creation, promotion and integration of *Bad Twin* into the larger *Lost* text demonstrated that "ancillary content" developed around television properties could be more than second-class derivative shlock. Instead, a program's expanded text – the network of content, products, activities and opportunities that surround and influence the audience's

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[25] Troup, G. "Bad Twin."

overall experience of a television program – could be used to usher in new creative and economic models. As Robert Thompson explained to *The New York Times*:

> What the entertainment industry has figured out is that *Lost* is not just a television show; it's a lifestyle. There's no limit. Not only are we going to see more books like *Bad Twin* in the publishing business, but more shows like *Lost*, in which you create this universe that people want to inhabit. You can make it real and put a price tag on it.[26]

The Lost Experience (ARG). Nowhere has the audience's desire to inhabit the *Lost* universe been more essential than in The Lost Experience (TLE), a five-month-long interactive campaign (often referred to as an ARG) produced as a collaboration between *Lost*'s creators and ABC's marketing department, and designed to maintain audience interest and speculation about *Lost*'s mysteries during the hiatus between the show's second and third seasons. TLE also coincided with (and provided additional advertising for) the commercial release of *Bad Twin*.

Like *Bad Twin*, TLE did not form explicit connections to the on-air narrative that unfolds in *Lost*. Unlike *Bad Twin*, however, creating a new narrative conceit for TLE was not only possible: due to the temporal conflict between the show's diegetic time and the audience's own time, it was mandatory. After all, while the show's diegetic timeline began on the same date that *Lost* premiered on ABC (September 22, 2004), it then advanced (as far as the audience knows) at a different pace than the "outside world." At the end of the second season, *Lost*'s diegetic action was set somewhere in late 2004, a good 18 months behind the audience's own timeline, making it impossible to develop a real-time experience set on the island without revealing the diegetic events that unfolded during the 18 month interim.

Instead, the action of TLE hinged on a new set of characters (whose actors, it is worth noting, also commanded lower salaries than the stars of the broadcast program). Viewer-participants were charged with assisting an anonymous hacker named Persephone, who claimed that The Hanso Foundation – a mysterious non-profit organization that seems to be somehow responsible for a number of the mysterious phenomena depicted in *Lost*'s on-air narrative – was perpetrating crimes against humanity. At the same time, The Hanso Foundation itself (supported by an official website detailing their public efforts to improve the world)

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[26] Lee, F R. "Where to Find the 'Lost' Novel: On the Best-Seller Lists," *The New York Times*. 2006.

issued a series of "press releases" and "editorials" (in fact, paid advertisements) in national newspapers, (including *The Washington Post*) accusing the just-released *Bad Twin* of slandering their organization.

From the beginning of May until the end of September, TLE's narrative sequence unfolded across a wide range of media platforms and in real-world locations, and relied upon both original (diegetic) and existing (commercial) websites; weblogs; online, television and print-based advertisements for The Hanso Foundation; the "controversial" release of *Bad Twin*; a series of podcasts that allowed viewers to call in and share their theories about The Hanso Foundation; a live appearance during the *Lost* panel at the San Diego ComicCon; the distribution of chocolate bars that concealed hidden clues; an online scavenger hunt to assemble the fragments of a missing film; interviews with fictional characters on late-night television and in *Entertainment Weekly*; and a great deal more.[27] According to co-executive producer Cuse, TLE reflected the *Lost* team's desire "to tell stories in a nontraditional way." As he explained in April 2006, shortly before the campaign began, "there were certain stories that [we] were interested in telling that don't exactly fit into the television show."[28] Through TLE, however, the show's creators were able to explore specific aspects of the show's mythology in a level of detail that would have been impossible on television, or, at the very least, alienating to viewers less interested in the show's mysteries than its central characters, relationships and action.

At the same time, however, TLE was also an open experiment in the integration of entertainment content and brand advertising, with the campaign promoting not only *Lost* but a small roster of corporate sponsors that included Sprite, Jeep, Monster.com and Verizon. According to Michael Benson, the senior vice president at ABC who oversaw the marketing department's involvement in TLE, the most important innovation of the campaign was that it featured content that was "devised by the show's writers, not by marketers," a decision that made it difficult for the audience to dismiss the initiative as "mere advertising." Instead, Benson asserted, The Lost Experience represented a new marketing paradigm, which operated on the understanding that:

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[27] While a more complete description of The Lost Experience is beyond the scope of this discussion, a more detailed timeline of TLE's narrative content and components parts is provided in Askwith, I, Deconstructing The Lost Experience (Cambridge, MA: Convergence Culture Consortium, 2006).
[28] Miller, L. "To Counter the Doldrums During Summer Reruns, 'Lost' Fans Can Get Lost in a Game Online," *The New York Times*. 2006.

> You have to give the audience something to connect to. I want to prove to the audience that this is something they will enjoy, that is organic to the show. I don't want the audience to feel like "they are just selling to me or marketing to me."

As TLE progressed, it became that some advertisers understood these principles better than others. Given a great deal of freedom to choose the context and specifics of their presence in the campaign's narrative progression, TLE's sponsors experimented with several different approaches to integrating brand messages into the campaign's content.

The most problematic and awkward of these approaches came from Sprite, which attempted to draw an implicit thematic connection between the campaign's "conspiracy" motifs and their recent "Sublymonal" campaign, but failed to offer any narrative justification or explanation for the decision. As a result, Sprite's participation in TLE struck most participants as blatant and antagonistic advertising, with some TLE-focused online communities discussing the prospect of organizing an anti-branding campaign to convince consumers not to drink Sprite.

By contrast, Jeep's participation in TLE demonstrated a far greater respect for both the campaign and its participants. Rather than wrapping their participation in the trappings of a pre-existing and potentially incompatible branding effort, Jeep found a logical role for themselves within the campaign narrative. Early in the timeline of TLE, Persephone discovers that The Hanso Foundation has arranged a contract with Jeep to provide a fleet of their newest vehicles for use on an upcoming research expedition in an secret location, a term that (in the context of *Lost*'s larger narrative) might refer to the island where the show takes place. With some "hacking assistance" from TLE's viewer-players, Persephone contacts a high-ranking executive at Jeep and convinces him to break the contract for ethical reasons. As a result, Jeep was able to (1) introduce a new product line; (2) distinguish their brand by distancing it from the campaign's apparent villain; (3) advance, rather than disrupt, the campaign's narrative; and (4) enhance the viewer's experience of immersion in a fictional experience by lending Jeep's "real-world" presence.[29]

As reward for their efforts, viewers who participated in TLE were given several pieces of "important information," the most important of which was a secret film that revealed the origin and significance of the

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[29] For a more detailed analysis of *Lost*'s repositioning and relationship with real-world brands, see Johnson, D. "Media Convergence, Narrative Divergence: "Lost" in the Worlds, Institutions, and Economics of Multiplatform Network Storytelling." SCMS. 10 March 2007. .

show's recurring numerical sequence, and clarified the original intentions that account for The Hanso Foundation's mysterious presence on the island where *Lost* takes place. Yet in retrospect, it remains unclear how the narrative events and revelations of the campaign might or might not relate to the canonical (or "official") *Lost* narrative. While the show's producers insist that the information can be considered accurate and canonical, the show's subsequent third season offered no acknowledgement or reference to indicate that this information is important. Furthermore, even the "truth" has proven somewhat ambiguous, as viewers have started to realize that (for example) knowing the origin and significance of the numbers offers no explanation for their frequent and near-mystical recurrence on the show. In the final analysis, those viewers who express the most appreciation for The Lost Experience have indicated that the experience of participating was far more interesting, valuable and memorable than the campaign's narrative "reward."

3.4. Relevant Information

One of the most compelling – and often frustrating – aspects of *Lost* is its extensive use of intertextual allusions and references. As noted earlier in this chapter, *Lost*'s structure and content often mirror that of *Twin Peaks*, particularly in Jenkins' assessment that "almost anything can count as a clue."[30] In observing *Lost*, one might add this addendum to Jenkins' observation: when anything can count as a clue, all information becomes relevant.

Aware that *Lost* fans will attempt to parse the significance out of even the smallest details, the show's writers and producers often include and emphasize obscure elements and references, sometimes foregrounding them in the action (e.g., when Locke is seen filling in a crossword puzzle) and other times hiding them in the background (e.g., when the camera stops on a bookshelf long enough for viewers to discern specific titles). Even the show's basic construction is riddled with allusions and references of questionable significance: several main characters are named after philosophers (e.g. Locke, Rousseau, Hume), intellectuals (Bakunin, Burke, Carlyle), while the names of others may have symbolic implications (e.g. Christian Shepherd) or even function as anagrams (e.g. Ethan Rom = *Other Man*, Gary Troup =

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[30] Jenkins, 1995 #84@56-57}

Purgatory). Suggestive references in the show have led *Lost* devotees to educate themselves on topics ranging from experimental quantum physics to ancient mythology, among many others.

Lost and Literature. Most provocative of all are *Lost*'s references to texts that exist outside of the show's own diegetic space. During the first three seasons, viewers caught significant references to (or on-screen appearances of) more than forty different works of literature, including significant works of fiction (e.g. *Alice in Wonderland, Watership Down*), mythology (e.g. the Bible, the Epic of Gilgamesh) and science (e.g. *A Brief History of Time*). Some of these texts seem to be encouraging popular fan theories (e.g. *Jurassic Park* relates to the popular theory that the island and its monster are part of a scientific experiment gone awry; *A Wrinkle in Time*, that the island represents a rift in the space-time continuum), while others seem to advance new theories for debate.

In an interview during the show's second season, one of *Lost*'s writer advised that viewers should watch upcoming episodes for a reference to a British novel called *The Third Policeman*, which features a main character who doesn't realize that he is dead. As executive producer Cuse told a reporter, the book:

> was carefully chosen as a way to suggest a possible theory about what was going on on the island," he says. "Does it mean that was real, or does it mean that we were just teasing the audience and being sort of self-referential? I can't answer that question for you.[31]

Even more interesting than *Lost*'s reference to other texts, however, is the effort that many of the show's followers invest in tracking down and uncovering possible leads. Following the appearance of *The Third Policeman* in the first episode of the second season, paperback sales of the book soared, even though it remained unclear what significance the reference held, or if it was significant at all. By the end of the first season, aware of the frantic discussion and research that *Lost*'s literary allusions produced, fans and critics alike began to jokingly refer to the texts featured in the show as new selections in "The *Lost* Book Club." By the end of *Lost*'s third season, however, it was no longer a joke: the practice of acquiring, reading and discussing the books that appeared during the show had become so widespread that dedicated *Lost* reading

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[31] Weiss, J. "Who's running the show? As creators draw inspiration from fans, 'Lost' becomes an interactive experience," *The Boston Globe.* 2005.

groups began to form. Participants in these groups, which convene in locations both predictable (*Lost* fan communities) and unpredictable (*The Washington Post*'s website),[32] have explained that reading and debating the significance of *Lost*'s various intertextual references helps them "get through" the nine-month hiatus between seasons of the show.

In the context of this discussion, the formation of *Lost* reading groups provides an extreme example of how a show's viewers may choose to prolong their engagement with a favorite program by seeking out and processing relevant information. The significance of *Lost's* audience engagement, then, can be glimpsed in the show's power to direct and channel the attention of its audience toward texts and topics with no intrinsic relationship to the show itself.

3.5. Extratextual Information

For viewers seeking extratextual information about *Lost*, there are several official options. The most basic of these appear on the show's official website, where visitors can read basic (if impersonal) biographical statements about the show's cast. A recently added feature ("Writer's Rotation") also provides a list of the books and music that *Lost*'s writers are currently enjoying, information that makes the writers seem more accessible and "knowable" as individuals, while also functioning as a possible source of clues (insofar as the viewer assumes that a writer's current media consumption will influence, or at least hint at, the writer's ideas and contributions to the show). Beyond these basics, *Lost* also releases extratextual information in several other forms.

DVD Bonus Materials. Like most commercial movies and programs, *Lost*'s DVD collections feature a standard range of extratextual bonus materials, including commentary tracks, "making-of" production featurettes, tours of shooting locations, behind-the-scenes interviews, deleted scenes, production out-takes and bloopers, and so on. After the release of the Season 2 DVDs, fans expressed particular enthusiasm for

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[32] CITE

the packaging of the included extras, which were introduced with a short film, shot and produced to resemble the ominous "training" films discovered on the island throughout the second season.

In the case of *Lost*, deleted scenes are often emphasized as the most desirable DVD extras, since viewers can use these unaired sequences to inform their ongoing speculation over the show's mysteries. At the same time, however, deleted scenes can often prove controversial when cited in discussion, since the canonical status of unaired material is often unclear. As the viewer-generated *Lostpedia* warns:

> Note: Some believe that deleted scenes should be considered canonical, if no other information conflicts them. Information on Lostpedia from deleted scenes must be clearly marked (sometimes called "apocrypha" or "deuterocanon").[33]

Official *Lost* Podcasts. Starting early in *Lost*'s second season, ABC began producing a series of free "official podcasts." With occasional exceptions, a new podcast was released 3-4 days before each new episode of the season aired, and made available both as a free download (through the iTunes Music Store) and as streaming audio (from ABC.com).

In general, each podcast includes a brief one-on-one interview with a member of the show's cast, along with 15-20 minutes of amiable (if self-indulgent) banter between *Lost*'s co-executive producers, Carlton Cuse and Damon Lindelof. During this segment of the podcast, Cuse and Lindelof review the previous week's episode, highlighting points that the audience should be attentive to; share behind-the-scenes anecdotes about the writing and production processes; offer a few cryptic hints regarding the week's upcoming episode, and respond to a few selected audience questions submitted through the show's official discussion forum. While some installments of the podcast prove more informative than others, the participation of Cuse and Lindelof seems to have a significant cumulative effect, with comments in both official and unofficial *Lost* discussion communities indicating that a large portion of viewers participating in these communities tend to look forward to the podcast, and suggesting that regular podcast listeners – who often speak about the showrunners as if describing friends or acquaintances – often develop basic parasocial relationships with them.

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[33] See http://lostpedia.com/wiki/Canon.

*The Lost Chronicles***: Official Companion Book.**   Released in September 2005 to coincide with the beginning of *Lost*'s second season, *The Lost Chronicles* functions as an "official companion book," and provides its owners with 176 pages of repackaged and extratextual information. The repackaged content takes the form of a comprehensive episode guide, and provides extensive detail about the content of each episode from *Lost*'s first season. The extratextual information, gathered by author Mark Cotta Vaz under a contract with ABC, consists of behind-the-scenes photos, a detailed walkthrough of the various phases involved in producing an episode of the show, personal interviews with the show's leading actors and writers, and so on.

Yet while *The Lost Chronicles* provided a desirable informational resource for viewers eager to position themselves as extratextual experts, knowledgeable about specific details of *Lost*'s production process, practitioners and evolution, most of the information in the volume repeated details that *Lost*'s most ardent fans would already know, suggesting that the book was designed either as a gift ("Perfect for *Lost* Lovers!") or as a collectible item, capable of signaling the owner's personal investment in the program.

The last page of *The Lost Chronicles* reinforces the notion of guide-as-collectible, in that it consists entirely of advertisements for other *Lost* collectibles and memorabilia, including trading cards, the fan magazine, and a website (lostfans.tv) offering "amazing discounts on Official *Lost* Merchandise!"

*Lost***: The Official Magazine.** Published six times a year by Titan Magazines, the official *Lost* magazine is designed to appeal to the show's most visible fans. Like *The Lost Chronicles*, the content of the *Lost* magazine is comparable (if not inferior) to the free content and information which circulates in the show's various fan communities. Regular features of the magazine include exclusive interviews with the show's cast and crew; behind-the-scenes photos and technical explanations; vague hints about upcoming narrative developments; a reader mail page where subscribers can share their theories about the show and its mysteries; and reproductions of production art, script pages or other "exclusive" documents from *Lost*'s production process.

Featuring over-sized pull quotes, familiar images, and obvious *Lost* references on most pages, and advertisements for various show-related products and content (often disguised as "feature articles") interspersed throughout, the magazine appears to serve two basic functions: first, to act as a central vehicle for

promoting the entire range of ancillary products that make up *Lost*'s extended text, and second, to support the reader's desire for personal and social identification with *Lost,* by constructing the show's identifiable themes, icons and performers as familiar and accessible.

3.6. Branded Products

While most popular television programs spawn at least a basic line of shirts, posters and other branded merchandise, *Lost*'s current product lines represent a more unusual approach to branding. While ABC has arranged for a standard assortment of licensed *Lost* products, including apparel (t-shirts, sweatshirts, polo shirts, hoodies), drinkware (shot glasses, coffee mugs, etc) as well as posters, calendars and notebooks, the show's marketing team has produced fewer and fewer of these basic items each year since the show's debut. Instead, *Lost*'s licensing efforts have shifted toward an increasingly common practice that can be described as "diegetic merchandising."

3.6.1. Diegetic Merchandise

The practice of diegetic merchandising, as its name implies, focuses on the production of products adorned not with the "show" brand, but with brands from within the show's diegetic frame. As Derek Johnson has pointed out, *Lost's* narrative premise – survivors stranded on a desert island – made it difficult for the program to participate in the standard product placement deals that connect most modern television programs to a range of real-world brands and products[34]. Instead, beginning in the show's second season, *Lost* began constructing its own diegetic brands, the most notable of which belongs to the Dharma Initiative, a mysterious research organization that has constructed underground bunkers as "research stations" in several hidden locations around the island. As these stations are discovered, new brand logos are introduced, with each station bearing a unique variation on the basic Dharma logo. More importantly, the Dharma brand itself appears on an ever-greater number of consumer products and packaged goods, culminating in the

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[34] For more on *Lost*'s construction of the Dharma and Hanso brands, see Johnson. "Media Convergence, Narrative Divergence: "Lost" in the Worlds, Institutions, and Economics of Multiplatform Network Storytelling." .

discovery of an underground pantry filled with hundreds of Dharma-branded items, at which point *Lost* appeared to be offering a tongue-in-cheek critique of brand saturation.

Perhaps it is ironic, then, that many *Lost* viewers began to express a desire to purchase their own Dharma-brand products and goods. The formula, as established in the program, was simple enough: with a blank white label, a Dharma logo, and a short, functional title, any product could be transformed into a Dharma-brand product. In fact, well before ABC began offering Dharma t-shirts, mugs, notebooks and shot glasses, many *Lost* communities began circulating Dharma-brand templates that could be printed at home on stickers and applied to products such as beer, crackers and peanut butter, and encouraged members to post photos of their own Dharmafied pantries online.[35]

On its surface, the shift toward developing diegetic merchandise seems somewhat illogical. After all, in the absence of a show's recognizable brand identity (in this case, the word "Lost"), it might appear that such items lose their intrinsic value, both to the show's marketers (who view branded items as free additional promotion for their program) and to the show's viewers (who use branded items, at least in some situations, to signal their affiliation with a show to others).

In practice, however, the truth might be just the opposite. Since non-viewers are unlikely to recognize the diegetic logos that are familiar to viewers of the show, there is a greater chance that the public display of diegetic brands will create curiosity, which in turn might compel them to inquire about the meaning and significance of the unfamiliar brand, thus resulting in an active dialogue that generates increased interest about the show, rather than a passive recognition that the show exists. At the same time, from a consumer perspective, the shift to diegetic branding may actually enhance a branded object's expressive potential by "encoding" the signal: since show-branded merchandise is only effective in signaling information about its owner to other individuals with similar appreciation and investment, the shift to diegetic branding enhances the expressive significance of the brand.

Or, to put this in more concrete terms: if a *Lost* viewer wears a Dharma-branded shirt, there are two possible outcomes: (1) the shirt will be seen by another *Lost* viewer, who will know where the logo

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[35] The creators of the most elaborate and detailed Dharma brand templates, according to their website, were asked to take them offline once ABC began producing their own Dharma-brand merchandise. In keeping with the diegetic motif, the creators agreed, but posted modified photos of their Dharma products online, now bearing large stamps reading "Removed at the Request of the Hanso Foundation." (See http://www.insanelygreattees.com/news/?p=27 for more information.)

originates, immediately establishing both individuals as members of a common community, or (2) the shirt will be seen by an individual who does not watch *Lost*, at which point curiosity about the meaning or significance of this unfamiliar brand icon may compel the non-viewer to approach the branded fan and ask for an explanation. Thus the process of diegetic branding may in fact be more effective in serving the interests of both the brand-owners and brand-consumers than more traditional and identifiable "show brands."

3.6.2. Collectible Merchandise

As a program capable of generating cult-like viewer engagement, it was inevitable that *Lost* would offer collectible merchandise. While this designation could be understood to include items such as the official *Lost* fan magazine or companion guide, in this context, the show's most compelling collectibles are a line of action figures and a series of limited-edition trading cards.

Action Figures. Developed by MacFarlane Toys, a merchandiser well-respected among fan cultures for producing extremely detailed and photo-realistic figurines and statuettes, the *Lost* action figures are in fact closer to motionless sculptures. Aware that fan communities often evaluate such objects in terms of their ability to capture and reproduce an accurate and evocative likeness of a show's characters, MacFarlane has been careful to ensure that mainstream media coverage of the product line emphasizes the use of "state-of-the-art" equipment which captures a full, detailed, and precise three-dimensional scan of the performer's entire body. The resulting figurines, at least according to MacFarlane, capture the characters in vivid detail. Furthermore, each figurine has an embedded sound chip that replays 3-4 of the character's memorable lines of dialogue from the series, is set against a detailed scenic backdrop, and comes packaged with a life-sized reproduction of a character-specific "artifact" (e.g., the figurine of Hurley includes a perfect replica of the character's fateful winning lottery ticket).[36]

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[36] In another compelling example of the depth at which *Lost* fans tend to engage with the show's various extensions, a number of fans who purchased the Hurley figurine reported back to their online communities that the included lottery ticket had a large block of Latin text printed where the legal fine print should be, and requested assistance in translating the text to determine its potential

It is important to note that each of these misnamed action figures (which have no movable parts, and thus are incapable of even the most basic action) are designed to capture their respective subjects during a specific and significant character moment from the television series (e.g. Jin's action figure recreates the character's capture at the beginning of *Lost*'s second season). Representing a conscious and careful attempt to recreate a specific moment from the television program, the *Lost* figurines work to evoke memorable scenes, and to temporarily "restore" the viewer's initial emotional experience of those scenes.

Trading Cards. The official *Lost* trading cards, released in several limited-edition waves corresponding to the specific seasons of the show, are manufactured by InkWorks, a niche merchandiser that specializes in the production of trading cards based on a range of fan-favorite television programs (e.g. *Buffy The Vampire Slayer*, *Smallville*, *The Family Guy*). Following the model developed by InkWorks across all of their collectible lines, the *Lost* cards fall into several different categories. The most common of these are "Episode Cards," featuring images from memorable moments in the series, and "Character Cards," which provide brief profiles for each of the show's characters. In order to make the cards more appealing to collectors, however, InkWorks also inserts "bonus cards" into the packets at random, which draw upon the concept of authenticity to increase their value and uniqueness, with each card featuring either a hand-signed autograph from one of the show's performers or a tiny fragment of an actual costume that was worn on-screen during the show's production.[37]

3.8. Themed Activities

Jigsaw Puzzles. As noted in Chapter 2, jigsaw puzzles are often one of the least compelling examples of a "themed" activity: a product or pastime that has no intrinsic relation to a series, but which is marketed and sold in relation to the show by the most tenuous of associations. In the case of the *Lost* jigsaw puzzles, this tenuous association was two-fold: first, as suggested in advertisements for the puzzles, was a

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significance. The text, unfortunately, turned out to be nothing more than the standard "Ipsum dolorum" text often used as a placeholder by graphic designers.

[37] *Lost* Trading Cards, promotional page. <http://www.inkworkscards.com/products/lost/lost2/lost2newprod1.html>

conceptual link which pointed out that *Lost* was "TV's most puzzling hit drama." Since this might be too opaque a connection, however, the puzzles also drew upon a thematic link: each puzzles, when assembled, revealed a different photo-collage of *Lost* imagery.

However, presumably aware that only the most devoted *Lost* fans would be willing to purchase a product as thinly associated with the program as a jigsaw puzzle – let alone the entire series of four – *Lost*'s licensing team took an approach that was both astonishing in its ingenuity and infuriating in its transparency: in what might well be a marketing first, *Lost* managed to position even the most generic of activities as an opportunity to gain insight into the show's narrative mysteries.

Both the official advertisement for the puzzles and the puzzle boxes themselves are inscribed with bright red text that declares:

> SPOILER WARNING: Secrets are revealed! Do not assemble any puzzle in this series unless you want
> exclusive new insight into TV's most puzzling hit drama.

Yet in spite of this ostensible warning, *Lost*'s marketers clearly understand the value proposition that the show's jigsaw puzzles are making: for avid fans of the series, the prospect of "exclusive insight" is not so much a threat as a promise. As such, the *Lost* jigsaw puzzles demonstrate an astonishing and blatant willingness to sell information, the show's most valuable (yet inexhaustible) commodity.

Even more astonishing was the amount of effort that the puzzles demanded of viewers in order to yield the desired information. Upon opening one of the puzzles, viewers learned that in order to access the "exclusive insight" promised on the box, they would have to put together the entire 1000-piece puzzle, turn it over, and turn off the lights. This, in turn, would reveal a glow-in-the-dark image, which itself represented only one-quarter of a larger image[38]. Thus, in order to reveal the entire image, viewers were

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[38] The use of glow-in-the-dark ink, I suspect, is intended to fulfill three important functions. From a diegetic perspective, it parallels the show, since the completed image reproduces a map that appeared unexpectedly (during the second season episode "Lockdown") and was visible only under a black light. From the viewer's perspective, it lends the entire experience an air of intrigue. Finally, from

required to purchase and complete not one, but all four *Lost* puzzles. Those who were willing to put in this degree of effort were eventually rewarded with a completed image, which was in fact a detailed reproduction of an map that had appeared on screen during a brief and climactic sequence during the show's second season, with a few numerical ciphers scattered the edges as an extra reward.

This means that the *Lost* jigsaw puzzles, all told, offered the show's viewers the chance to spend more than $40 and assemble 4000 puzzle pieces, all for the opportunity to scrutinize a map and uncover a handful of encrypted messages. That the puzzles were successful in generating both ancillary revenue and prolonged, active engagement with *Lost*'s expanded text illustrates the tremendous lengths to which the show's fans are willing to go in order to solve its narrative challenges.

3.9. Experiential Activities

While The Lost Experience functioned as an experiential opportunity for players to immerse themselves in a *Lost*-related narrative, the show's producers have also expressed an active interest in the development of experiential activities that allow viewers to re-enact and re-live *Lost*'s central narrative.

***Lost*: The Board Game.** The first attempt in this direction resulted in the creation of a *Lost* board game, which assigns each of its players a random character from the island, and through a convoluted set of instructions pits them against each other in a race to either kill or "take control of" all of the other active characters in the game. The most immediate problem with this is that it has little relation to the narrative premise of the show, which more often features the show's characters working together to survive in unfamiliar surroundings, while simultaneously seeking explanations for the island's various mysteries, and attempting to secure rescue through communicate with the outside world. At no point do the show's characters set out to kill or dominate each other; thus, providing the audience with opportunities to do so seems somewhat misguided.

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the manufacturer's perspective, it makes it difficult for viewers to photograph the image and distribute it online – a practice that would undermine the puzzles' commercial prospects among mainstream viewers altogether.

In addition, the game provides little excuse or explanation for its frequent reliance on de-contextualized references to the show. As players move around the "island," they may land on specific tiles that identify themselves as familiar diegetic settings (e.g. Sawyer's Stash, The Fuselage, Romantic Beach, etc), while also acquiring "Fate" cards, which use dice-rolling competitions to simulate the character's attempts to respond to various threats and events that have occurred (or could conceivably occur) during their tenure on the island (e.g. Encounter with Small Polar Bear, Bugs Attack, etc). The result, unfortunately, is a game that fails to offer players a meaningful or engaging experience, while also failing to provide any additional insight or information that might enhance a player's experience of the series itself.

Despite these problems, however, "*Lost*: The Board Game" was apparently a commercial success: a member of the show's production staff reports that the game sold extremely well, and that executives within ABC felt it to be a successful merchandising effort. Perusing the public message board at lostboardgame.com, however, suggests that these sales figures may not correlate with a positive experience for players: while many users were satisfied with the game, just as many found the game frustrating, vague, incomplete, or poorly conceived: as of July 2007, thread titles on the first page of discussion alone included "a complicated and awkward game," "class action law suit," "utterly terrible," and "The worst game I have ever played."[39]

*Lost***: The Mobile Game.** Developed by Gameloft, *Lost: The Game* was released for cell phones in January 2007, with a graphically-enhanced version for Apple's iPod following in May 2007. Unfortunately, much like the board game, *Lost*'s mobile game was also something of a misfire. According to its promotional materials, *Lost:* The Mobile Game would allow players to "relive the unbelievable epic of the missing passengers of flight 815 through the eyes of Jack, the charismatic hero."[40] The game itself, however, consisted largely of mundane, repetitive tasks, such as shooting wild boar and retrieving water. Despite the much-publicized writing involvement of *Lost* script coordinator Gregg Nations, the game's restrictive mechanics proved frustrating to viewers hoping for a more immersive experience. As a reviewer for IGN concluded:

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[39] http://lostboardgame.com/forums/forumdisplay.php?fid=14, accessed July 26, 2007.
[40] GameLoft Promotional Site: Lost. <http://www.gameloft.com/product.php?product=185&product_name=LOST%99>

> *Lost* is an extremely linear game that never allows you to step outside a very preordained path between plot points. Because you are replaying highlight scenes from the show, this design decision makes sense, but with the Lost universe apparently so rich with character development, intriguing locations, and mystery, being "on rails" is kind of a disappointment.[41]

Another frequent complaint about the mobile game concerned its lack of a conclusion: the game ended not with an act of narrative closure, but with the infuriating legend "To Be Continued…" This design decision reveals a significant challenge involved in developing meaningful interactive experiences in tandem with ongoing, serialized narratives. Since the game's narrative could not move ahead of the most recent events depicted in the series itself, players could do little more than experience a low-resolution recreation of various moments culled from *Lost*'s first two seasons. Since the game designers at Gameloft had no knowledge regarding the specifics of the show's eventual narrative resolutions, the game itself was incapable of providing (or even hinting at) new information that might inform a viewer's reading of the show: in several cases, the game designers even misinterpreted or misremembered narrative questions that had already been resolved on the program, and were subsequently asked to correct certain mistakes in order to avoid giving players misleading information.

Lost: The Video Game. The most ambitious and extensive of *Lost*'s experiential activities, however, is still in production. *Lost*: The Video Game is being developed by Ubisoft with active involvement from the show's creative team, and is slated for release in February 2008, to coincide with the beginning of the show's fourth season. While information about the game has been scarce, Ubisoft and the *Lost* team finally broke their silence on July 26, 2007, to preview the game during a presentation at the San Diego ComicCon. Ubisoft's press release gives a basic overview of the game's premise, explaining that

> As a passenger of Oceanic flight 815, you survived the crash and find yourself on an uncharted island somewhere in the Pacific Ocean. As you begin to unravel mysteries of the island, you begin to discover secrets of your own. You will have to understand your past mistakes in order to survive and find your way home…
>
> • Play as a survivor of Oceanic Flight 815: Confront your dark past, seek your redemption, and ultimately find a way home.

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[41] Buchanan, L. "Lost for iPod Review." *IGN*. 18 June 2007.

- Authentic 'Lost' experience: Explore familiar locations, unravel mysteries, and interact with the main characters from the show.

- Survive the challenges that the island throws at you: Solve puzzles, outsmart enemies, battle the smoke monster, and overcome many other challenges to survive the island and come out alive.[42]

Since the game is not only unreleased, but still in active development, it is too soon to determine what particular logics of engagement it will enable, and how effective it will be in doing so. At present, it appears that the game is being developed primarily as a stand-alone experience, offering players the chance to immerse themselves in the world depicted on *Lost*, explore the island on their own, and interact with their favorite characters. Whether the game will also act as a narrative extension, making some new contribution to the show's central ongoing narrative, or providing information which aids viewers in better comprehending the show's mysteries, is unclear. Following the conclusion of The Lost Experience, however, the show's creative team has expressed reluctance to provide any significant narrative content outside of the television episodes themselves, for fear of angering or alienating the vast percentage of the show's viewers who opt not to engage with *Lost*'s interactive extensions.

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[42] Ubisoft. "Ubisoft Announces First Details For The Lost Video Game." Press Release. 26 July 2007.

CONCLUSION

The Future of Engagement

As the discussion in the previous chapter suggests, *Lost* presents a remarkable example of a television text that draws upon a wide range of engagement opportunities to encourage and reinforce viewer-text relationships that run far deeper than those of most other programs. For all that *Lost* has done right, however, what makes the show such a compelling case study in this context is the simple, tragic fact that it arrived too soon to realize its own potential, and to reap the full benefits of its own innovation in enabling and encouraging new forms of viewer engagement. In May 2007, in order to ensure *Lost*'s long-term narrative integrity, ABC took the unusual step of announcing that the series will run for another three seasons, with the series' "highly anticipated and shocking finale" airing in May 2010[1]. Within the television business, such a decision has little or no precedent, since the act of setting an expiration date for one of their most profitable franchises three years in advance represents a departure from the industry's established models demand that a show remain on the air until it is no longer profitable.

As *Lost* executive producer Lindelof noted in February 2006, television has traditionally been an exceptionally difficult medium within which to create elaborate, long-term narratives, since showrunners have always lacked the freedom to end their own stories:

> We could all band together and say, 'We're ending the show after three seasons because that's the arc. They get off the island, and we reveal all the things we want to reveal.' And the network would say, 'No, you won't.' They will hire somebody and do 'Lost,' with or without you."[2]

That *Lost* should be the first show to benefit from such an unusual arrangement is unsurprising, and suggests that, at the very least, the television business is beginning to understand the long-term value of its creations. Learning from the gradual burnout that has afflicted many long-running cult shows (e.g., *The X-Files*), ABC's decision reflects awareness that television's emerging business models sometimes require short-term sacrifices (e.g. ending *Lost* before its audience loses interest altogether) in order to secure long-

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[1] ABC. "ABC GIVES VIEWERS 48 MORE ORIGINAL EPISODES OF THE HIT DRAMA "LOST," CULMINATING IN AN EXCITING SERIES CONCLUSION." Press Release. 7 May 2007.
[2] Korbelik. "Popular 'Lost' is a cultural phenomenon."

term gains (e.g. the increased revenue that *Lost* will generate in long-term sales if it concludes while its 'brand' reputation is still strong). But with only three seasons remaining in its run, the fact is that *Lost* will probably reach its conclusion before the television business is prepared to accept and embrace the newer business models and opportunities that emerge as television begins to redefine itself in terms of viewer engagement.

This is unfortunate, to say the least, since *Lost* has demonstrated a tremendous ability to encourage almost unprecedented viewer involvement and commitment both in form and degree. Moreover, in doing so, it has provided a proof-of-concept for new engagement-based business models. These models depend not on the problematic and uncertain relationships between programmers, advertisers and viewers currently dictating the terms of the television business, but newer and more substantial connections emerging between viewers (both as individuals and communities) and engagement-inducing television texts such as *Lost*.

If *Bad Twin* is understood not as a mere example of creative licensing and commodified storytelling, but as an opportunity to experience a non-traditional form of intellectual and/or imaginative engagement with a television program, then the novel's appearance on *The New York Times* bestseller list supports two conclusions: first, that a substantial market for new forms of engagement already exists, at least around certain television texts and properties, and second, that many viewers are willing to make some form of financial investment in order to participate in these optional, text-enhancing experiences.

Even more revealing is *Lost*'s demonstrated ability to send its viewers outward from its own text in search of external texts, bodies of knowledge and products (e.g. O'Brien's *Third Policeman*). As Ryan Ozawa, co-host of popular *Lost* fan podcast *The Transmission* expressed to *The Seattle Times*:

> I love that a prime-time network TV show — usually considered a source of mind-numbing vapidity — is suddenly inspiring average Americans to read up on 'Gilgamesh' and history and Greek mythology and Christianity.[3]

The significance of Ozawa's observation resonates with the central contention of this thesis, which argues that television engagement can't be understood as a simplistic measurement of "how audiences watch television," but instead must describe what television compels audiences to do. The formation of *Lost*

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[3] Elber, L. "Will 'Lost' Ratings Plunge Doom Series?" *ABCNews.com*. 16 February 2007.

reading groups seems to indicate that, for all of its various promotional and paid extensions, *Lost*'s audience is willing to go further still in order to engage with the program – further even than the show's own producers and marketers, who continue to view opportunities for engagement not as a critical enabler of the show's success, or an explanation for much of the show's cult-like appeal, but as "added value" that drives the audience back toward *Lost*'s "mothership," the broadcast episodes that generate advertising revenue.

This failure to understand the true potential value of engagement television, if frustrating, is also understandable. That *Lost* showrunners Lindelof and Cuse have been able to participate in *Lost*'s various experiments and initiatives is, in and of itself, a significant accomplishment. As Cuse explains it:

> The job of being a television show-runner has evolved and there's all these new aspects to it. It's good because there are additional avenues open for content. We have ways of expressing ideas we have for the show that wouldn't fit into the television series.
>
> But it's hard to manage our time. And we honestly put most of our time and attention on the show itself — that still is the bread and butter of our existence.[4]

The two halves of Cuse's assessment, I would argue, express the greater contradiction that *Lost* embodies. While ABC and the *Lost* team have made significant progress in demonstrating the range of "additional avenues [now] open for content," and illustrated a more expansive model for understanding the nature of the modern television text, they remain trapped by conceptual protocols, industrial practices and economic models that require them to view the traditional television-specific program content as the "bread and butter of [television's] existence," and to evaluate the broader range of a show's engagement opportunities on the sole basis of their efficacy as promotional extensions.

The problem, as it turns out, is not that the television industry does not understand engagement: as the wide range of effective engagement opportunities described in this thesis should indicate, television has already proven itself capable of generating engagement. Instead, as the discussion in Chapter 1 has shown, the problem is that the industry is attempting to understand, define and express a new concept (viewer

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[4] Fernandez, M E. "ABC's 'Lost' is easy to find, and not just on a TV screen," *The Los Angeles Times.* 2006.

engagement) primarily – and in many cases, exclusively – in terms of its ability to preserve an old end (the advertiser-supported model of television).

Yet in order to develop a meaningful and productive framework for understanding engagement, the concept must be approached on its own terms and recognized for its own merits, rather than being reduced and forced to explain and justify itself in more familiar and comfortable terms. Engagement, as this thesis has attempted to illustrate, is not a process that happens in front of a television set. Nor is it a simple description of how a viewer watches television, or feels when watching television. Instead, engagement describes the larger system of material, emotional, intellectual, social and psychological investments a viewer forms through their interactions with the expanded television text.

Thus, understanding engagement in these terms also requires a new conceptual model for describing the modern television text. Under the terms of this new model, as elaborated in Chapter 2, the television text exists not as a series of episodic programs that appear on a television set, but as the larger network that encompasses and accounts for the related content, activities, products and patterns of social interaction that proliferate around, and as a result of, those programs.

Before concluding, it is important that I acknowledge two lingering challenges that remain, even within the framework of engagement that has been proposed here, as television settles into its new role as an engagement medium. These challenges result from the dramatic conceptual shift that is required, by both television audiences and producers, in order to understand television in terms of engagement. The notion that a television program's "expanded text" encompasses all of the diverse content, products, activities and social interactions that enable or compel a viewer to experience personal investment in a television program has significant implications for the way that both audiences and industrial practitioners understand and interpret the ongoing convergence of entertainment and advertising content.

From an audience perspective, the difficulty of this conceptual shift creates two more specific problems. The first of these problems results from the unfortunate truth that personal experience during the past two decades has given audiences good reason to be suspicious of any model of television that asks for more than the time and attention required to view their favored programming content. The entertainment industry's often crass approach toward product licensing and franchising has given viewer-consumers good reason to worry that the concurrent processes of convergence (between entertainment and advertising) and

divergence (of a single text into multiple component parts, distributed across multiple platforms and products) is fundamentally a process of exploitation, and that the emerging emphasis on viewer engagement will result not in better or more compelling entertainment experiences, but in more aggressive forms of advertising and content commodification.

The second problem, from an audience perspective, is simply that the range of opportunities inherent in the expanded television text can seem both daunting and excessive to those viewers who have been conditioned to think of television as something to be "watched," rather than "experienced" or "engaged." For viewers who have grown accustomed to content that begins and ends at clockwork intervals on the programming schedule, the emergence of transmedia content and show-related participation often appear to require a tremendous increase in work, with no promise of an equivalent increase in satisfaction or pleasure.

From an industrial perspective, the challenge of reconceptualizing the nature of television, and the relationship between a program and its various ancillaries, licenses and promotional extensions, poses other problems. The ongoing stream of contractual, legal and union negotiations that have stalled production on *The Lost Video Diaries* hint at many more conflicts yet to come. These conflicts are the inevitable and essential growing pains that will characterize television's transition from advertiser-supported to engagement-supported business models. As these new models emerge to dictate the terms of content development, distribution and monetization, network executives, content producers, professional practitioners, advertisers and merchandisers will all find themselves struggling to establish their roles and rights in the content and experience economies, while simultaneously hedging their bets and attempting to defend and preserve their existing stakes in television's traditional business models and practices.

As such, the content of this thesis – that viewer engagement has the potential to make a small, dedicated audience more valuable than a large, casual audience – immediately raises a series of significant concerns. The most pressing of these, at least from an industrial perspective, raise questions regarding how viewer engagement might create value, who it might create value for, and how that value might be expressed, modeled and capitalized upon. While some these questions have received consideration in this thesis, all warrant further research and analysis.

As new revenue models emerge, different parties will derive different degrees of benefit; as this thesis has suggested, it is possible (but improbable) that television will move from its current model, which

emphasizes the medium's potential to deliver attentive audiences to advertisers, and toward a model more like that of cinema and computer games, where entertainment content itself functions as the primary commodity and generator of profits, with advertising and product placement contracts providing additional revenue streams. While such an outcome may not serve the interests of advertisers as well as the current system, it might well clear the way for future experiments and innovations that build upon the efforts described in this thesis both to develop both additional opportunities for meaningful engagement and to support the various forms of engagement that those opportunities make possible.

APPENDIX I

Alternate Engagement Metrics

MEI: Q Scores

Developed by Marketing Evaluations, Inc. in 1963, Q Scores use surveys to measure audience "familiarity and appeal" with broadcast television programs (TVQ), cable television programs (Cable Q), celebrities and performers (Performer Q) and brands (Product Q).[1] Q Scores are calculated eight times during each television season, starting in late September, and are calculated using data from surveys with 1,800 children, teens and adults. The official Q Scores site explains, "programs can achieve strong Nielsen ratings and not have a strong appeal... TVQ measures how much an audience *likes* the programs."[2] According to a recent article, Q Scores summarize the various perceptions and feelings that consumers have, into a single, "likeability" measurement.[3]

Starcom: EnQ

Developed by the Starcom MediaVest Group in time for use with the fall 2005 television lineup, the EnQ program measures consumer engagement with programming by showing 15-minute clips from 22 new shows to focus groups, and then interviewing participants on their impressions about the show, including "the show's originality, the power of the cast, believability and characters," as well as external factors such as the show's scheduled time slot. While EnQ's scope appears to be restricted to viewer engagement with programming, Joanna von Felkerzam, director of SMG Insights, has clarified that the bottom line is still about advertising reception. As she explained in an interview with *Strategy Magazine*: "When we talk about engagement, the idea is it will have a positive impact on a consumer's ad recall, and with it, interest in the product and also potential purchase intent."[4]

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[1] http://www.qscores.com/

[2] http://www.qscores.com/tv.asp, my italics.

[3] "The Coming Conversation on TV Viewer Engagement."

[4] Summerfield, P. "Getting to Engagement." *Strategy*. June 2006.

Nielsen: Engagement Metrics

Announced in 2006, and being implemented on an experimental basis in 2007, Nielsen Research is exploring a research program that surveys Nielsen families to determine whether there was "a connection between what they watch and their recall, awareness and attitudes towards brands and products advertised."[5] The Nielsen Media Research website provides the group's chosen definition for engagement ("the focused mental and emotional connection between a consumer, a media vehicle and a brand's message") and indicates that their initial data will be gathered via telephone interviews designed to measure commercial recall and a series of "qualitative engagement factors."[6]

NIELSEN - ENGAGEMENT FACTORS

The factors being evaluated include:

Behavioral Data
- Length of tune
- Tuning to the commercial break
- Tuning to the commercial break plus the minutes preceding and after the break

Qualitative Data
- Level of involvement
- Favorite program
- Was viewing planned or via channel surfing

Commercial Attributes
- Weight of campaign
- Pod position
- Commercial duration

Consumer Attributes
- In market for product
- Activities done while viewing

Program Attributes
- Media type
- Commercial clutter

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[5] Moss, L. "Nielsen Seeks Terms of 'Engagement'." *Multichannel News.* 14 March 2006.

[6] Measuring Engagement (Nielsen Media Research).

Simmons Multimedia Engagement Study

In May 2006, Simmons Research announced the launch of a "National Multimedia Engagement Study," intended to provide "ratings of the cognitive, behaviourial, and emotional involvement consumers have with media."[7] To generate these ratings, Simmons asks participants to fill out surveys indicating their agreement with a variety of statements (e.g., "This program is a regular part of my schedule"), and groups these statements into "engagement dimensions." Simmons has provided a list of several dimensions measured in their research, but has not clarified how these dimensions are defined or how they translate into systematic metrics.

SIMMONS - DIMENSIONS OF ENGAGEMENT

"Engagement dimensions" measured in the Simmons study include:

- Inspirational
- Trustworthy
- Life enhancing
- Social Interaction
- Ad attention/receptivity
- Personal timeout
- Personal connection
- Near and dear[8]

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[7] Summerfield. "Getting to Engagement."

[8] Campanelli, M. "Engagement is next phase in marketing communications." *DM News*. 19 January 2007.

Scripps Network Viewer Engagement Study

At least four of the dimensions measured in the Simmons' initiative may have been taken from an earlier research project carried out by the Scripps Network, Simmons' frequent partner for audience research. The Scripps' Network Viewer Engagement Study provided a list of statements that described possible attitudes and sentiments, and asked participants to select the options that best described their feelings about the television channels they watched.

The findings proposed four distinct categories that describe the ways in which viewers relate to the television networks they watch: "(1) *Advertising Receptivity*, which refers to the role that advertising plays in the viewing experience; (2) *Life Enhancing*, which speaks to the role of personal relevance, aspiration and empowerment in TV viewing; (3) *Trusted Source*, or credibility of the networks; (4) *"Near and dear" TV*, or attributes such as uniqueness or desirability that relate to the likelihood that a consumer will choose to view a network."[9] The study also provided a list of the top 10 "attributes" that participants selected [*See Figure 1.4*], providing possible insight into audience motivations.

SCRIPPS NETWORK VIEWING STUDY

Top Cable and Broadcast TV Attributes
Ranked by Percent: Very/Somewhat Descriptive
Adults 25-54; Average of 50 Networks

1. This channel is fun to watch. (81 %)
2. This channel has shows you can't find anywhere else. (79%)
3. This channel is appropriate for the whole family. (75%)
4. This channel is one of your favorites. (63%)
5. This channel provides information you can use. (59%)
6. This channel is a trusted source of information. (56%)
7. You'd hate to give this channel up. (54%)
8. When you watch this channel you want other people in the room to be quiet. (54%)
9. You always learn something new and different when you watch this channel. (54%)
10. You make a special effort to set aside time to watch certain shows on this channel. (47%)

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[9] <u>Engagement: Understanding Consumers' Relationships with Media</u>, 17.

Initiative Media: Favorite Program Study

Beginning in March 2003, Initiative Media, in collaboration with researchers from the Comparative Media Studies program at MIT, gathered data about viewer attitudes toward their "favorite programs" as part of a larger project concerning *American Idol*. A pool of 500 viewers were provided with a list of 20 "attitudinal statements," and asked to indicate their agreement with each statement on a 5-point scale. The survey, which also included questions about viewing context, related internet activity and advertising recall, was designed to measure the relative importance of four relationship factors: relevance, affinity, comfort and resonance.[10]

INITIATIVE MEDIA - FAVORITE PROGRAM STUDY

Participants were asked to indicate, using a 5-point scale, how well the following statements reflected their feelings toward their self-selected "favorite program."

- This show exhibits values that I believe in.
- I get information.
- The show and characters are relevant to me and my life.
- I trust the show and characters.
- Teaches me how to cope.
- Challenges my worldview.
- Makes me feel "with-it" and "up-to-date."
- It entertains me.
- Usually holds my interest for entire episode.
- Spending time with my favorite show is a pleasurable experience.
- I make an effort to watch each episode.
- I discuss this show with others.
- Keeps me company when I'm alone.
- Lets me escape and/or forget troubles.
- Provides me with a sense of comfort.
- I feel relaxed during/after viewing.
- I record the show if I know I'm going to miss it.
- I think about what happened in the show days following it.
- I get very involved with the characters/participants.
- I look for other shows similar to my favorites.[11]

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[10] Koerner, *et al.* "Walking the Path: Exploring the Drivers of Expression." 8, 26
[11] Ibid.8, 27

Jack Myers: Emotional Connections

Since 1999, the Myers Media Business Report has conducted an ongoing research initiative to measure "audience attentiveness, engagement and association with TV networks."[12] Like Initiative's "Favorite Programs" study, Myers' research asks participants to indicate their agreement with a list of attitudinal statements [*See Figure 1.6*]; the resulting data is used to generate ratings that measure the depth of the audience's "emotional connection" with both networks and individual programs. According to the most recent round of reports, Myers' researchers compile ratings for more than 60 networks, and over 600 programs.[13]

JACK MYERS - EMOTIONAL CONNECTIONS RESEARCH

AUDIENCE REACH & VISIBILITY

1. I frequently watch this program.*

AUDIENCE ENGAGEMENT WITH PROGRAM/NETWORK CONTENT

2. This program is relevant to me and reflects my TV viewing interests.*
3. I consider this program to be like a trusted friend that I rely on.*
4. Once I tune into this program, I stay tuned without changing channels.*

AUDIENCE ATTENTIVENESS & RESPONSIVENESS TO ADVERTISING

6. This program has commercials that are interesting to me and I pay attention to them.
7. When I see ads on this program) I consider it a recommendation and I am more likely to purchase the product.

AUDIENCE COMFORT VIEWING WITH FAMILY & FRIENDS

8. I am comfortable viewing this program with my family.
9. I enjoy viewing this program with friends.

PROGRAM VALUE

10. I value this program enough to pay a special fee to watch it whenever I want.

* The first four statements, taken as a subset, form the basis of an additional Myers' study on Viewer Engagement Ratings; in the context of this discussion, however, the expanded reports on Viewer Emotional Connections offers a better indication of the scope of research currently being conducted and distributed within the industry.

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[12] Myers, J. ""Engagement" Moves to the Forefront of Advertising Valuation." *mediaVillage.com*. 13 December 2005.

[13] <u>Overall Emotional Connections Ratings</u> (Jack Myers Media Business Report, 2007).

Media Experience Monitor

During the 2005 Worldwide Readership Research Symposium, a group of three Dutch researchers presented a paper entitled "Media Experience and Advertising Experience: Application of a Multimedia Research Tool," which summarized their research into the relative importance of eight distinct "experiences" that consumers seek out in their interaction with various media channels.[14] The researchers, who were offering their research as the basis for a forthcoming service called the "Media Experience Monitor", noted that in their initial results, television's highest rankings were in "identification, social relationships and emotion," with much lower relative rankings for "information and practical use."[15]

MEDIA EXPERIENCE TYPES

IDENTIFICATION
- I recognized myself in it.
- I felt involved in it.
- I empathized with it.
- Showed me how I could approach problems.

INFORMATION
- Offered me something new.
- Gave me useful information.
- Gave me credible information.
- Taught me about what is going on in the world.
- Enabled me to gain knowledge of the opinions of others.
- Helped me in forming an opinion.

TRANSFORMATION
- Gave me enjoyment.
- Made me cheerful.
- Gave me a pleasant feeling.
- Gave me a satisfied feeling.
- Made me forget everything for a moment.
- Was relaxing.
- Was suitable for a moment by myself.

EMOTION
- Irritated me.
- Was rather unclear.
- Disturbed me.
- Made me sad.

PASTIME
- Filled an empty moment.

STIMULATION
- Excited me.
- Made me curious.
- Made me enthusiastic.
- Fascinated me.
- Was original and unique.

SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS
- Provided subjects of conversation.

PRACTICAL USE
- Provided me with useful ideas.
- Motivated me to cut something out/phone/visit a shop.

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[14] Engagement: Understanding Consumers' Relationships with Media, 19.

[15] Velthoven, S v and V Kuijpers. "Are you experienced?" Worldwide Readership Research Symposium. October 2005. 10

APPENDIX II

Ad*VIZR New Media Audit: 33 Touchpoints

I) Linear Broadcast Enhancements
Distribution platforms to enhance the viewer's experience with the content.

1. Synchronous PC Application	A computer program that runs on the Internet that has content and applications that are synced to match what's going on in the TV broadcast.
2. Addressable Targeting	TV ads that are custom-assembled to contextually match the viewer's demographic and psychographic profile.
3. HDTV	High Definition Television broadcasts.
4. HD Radio	High-Definition Radio broadcasts.
5. Satellite Radio	Satellite Radio broadcasts.
6. IP-delivered Video	Additional distribution of the program available online for consumers who have a high-speed connection. The content is available typically within a specified time frame, usually in "streaming media" or "downloadable" format.

II) Broadband Internet Program Enhancements
More interactive types of touchpoints meant to further engage viewers. These extensions are meant to be experienced by those who have high-speed internet access for the optimal effect.

7. Rich email reminders	Emails with flashy graphics and often contain animation and audio sent to fans as reminders to tune-in to the program.
8. Streaming Media Capability	Ability to see short clips or video excerpts from a program. Called "streaming" because the file is click-to-play, nothing needs to be downloaded or opened.
9. Wallpapers	Images, characters, scene clips from programs can be downloaded and used as wallpaper on the user's computer desktop.
10. Avatars/Icons	User created personal characters or pre-made icons made to represent their virtual personas.
11. Live Chat	A real-time instant messaging session in a "chat room" type of format carried on either among a show's fans or between the fans and an actor from the program.

12. Message boards	Conversations carried out online through sequential "posts" or updates made by fans. Fans can start a new discussion topic, pose questions to the group, or reply to other posts.
13. Out-takes	Deleted scenes that were filmed but didn't make the on-air program. Offered as exclusive or bonus content.
14. Blogs	A form of online diary that is started by the show creators or the fans surrounding the show.
15. Synchronous Games/Trivia	Entertaining facts that are synchronized to match what's going on in the TV broadcast.

III) Wireless
Additional content or activities meant for mobile phones.

16. SMS Polling	Text message voting.
17. Voice reminders	Voice mail reminders to watch the program.
18. Wallpapers	Cell phone wallpapers.
19. Ring-tones	Cell phone ring tones.
20. Mobisodes	Short videos for the cell phone.
21. Synchronous Mobile Apps	Games and trivia that are synchronized with the TV broadcast.
22. Video Reminders	Video reminders to watch on the cell phone.
23. M (Mobile) Coupons	Coupons/special offers for products via cell phones.
24. Avatars	Personal characters/cell phone identities.

IV) VOD
Video-on-demand channels offered through cable or satellite distributors, often advertiser sponsored.

25. MSO FVOD Channel Distribution	Content-themed VOD channels that can be sponsored by advertisers.

26. Cable Walled Garden Distribution	Advertiser-dedicated VOD Channel i.e. - Home Depot's DIY Channel.

V) Other Portal Distribution
Video-on-demand distributed through broadband by online portals such as AOL Broadband

27. VOD distributed via broadband	AOL Broadband, MSN Video, Google, Yahoo! Launch

VI) Digital OuterNet Extensions
Outdoor digital displays or displays at point-of-purchase/sale.

28. POS Networks	Point of Sale digital networks, such as little monitors at Target or Wal-Mart.
29. POP Kiosks	Point of purchase kiosks - stand alone digital displays that provide extra information to help make purchases (i.e. - cooking/cleaning tips, how to use).
30. Digital OOH Networks	Digital billboards and other permutations of digital outdoor advertising.

VII) Apple (Ad-Supported)
Ad-supported and for-purchase content that can be downloaded via iTunes (podcasts, video, and webisodes).

31. iTunes Audio Podcasts	Audio files downloaded through Apple iTunes and can be transferred to the iPod.
32. iTunes Video	Video clips downloaded through iTunes that can be uploaded to the iPod.
33. iTunes Webisodes	Full length or short videos of TV programs downloaded via iTunes that can be transferred to the iPod.

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