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2020

Audience Engagement Strategies in the Lizzie Bennet Diaries

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Audience Engagement Strategies in the Lizzie Bennet Diaries

A Thesis Submitted to the

Office of Graduate Studies

College of Arts & Sciences of

John Carroll University

in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

for the Degree of

Masters of Arts

By

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2020

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Abstract

Audience engagement research examines the strategies content creators use to enhance audience involvement beyond simply watching the content. This analysis applies audience engagement strategies generated from television, branding, and social media research to video blogs (vlogs), specifically in the context of the narrative of *The Lizzie Bennett Diaries*. As part of that analysis, this effort also identifies ways in which those strategies integrated into the vlog format. The strategies included addressing the audience directly, mentioning the vlog within the narrative, mentions of YouTube or the internet, asking the audience for input, and mentioning audience input with the vlog. All strategies except asking for audience input occurred in the vlog and a new strategy was discovered. The relationship between use of the strategies and their context/purpose in the story emerged as another engagement strategy in the vlog.

Keywords*: audience engagement, vlogs, YouTube*

Chapter 1: Introduction

The concept of audience engagement of narratives existed for years in various forms. These forms included any method that involved audience members. Engagement began as letter writing and evolved through audience members creating their own narratives, known most commonly as fan fiction. In the early years, content creators developed or promoted certain activities to engage their audiences (Guo & Chan-Olmsted, 2015). These activities encouraged audience members to relate with each other through fan mail, fan fiction, and other linear communications between content creators and the fans of their programs (te Walvaart, Dhoest, & Bulck, 2018). The activities helped creators gauge audience commitment as well as interest in their narratives. Content creators used these measures to assess popularity, providing creators ways to monetize their creations. Understanding how creators could use engagement strategies to popularize their narratives was essential for the growth and development of content.

Rationale for Study

While all narratives attempt to engage an audience, audience engagement strategies were those additional efforts by content creators to stimulate interaction within and between creators (writers, directors, actors) and audiences. Due to the length of time involved in sending letters, early activities lacked the interactivity fostered by today's social media. Audiences engaged through participation in organizations or events such as clubs and conventions. Fans interacted in person with small numbers of other fans, but rarely with content creators. Through reading fan mail, content creators gained insight into the thoughts of their audiences, but they rarely responded directly. This approach was one-sided.

Audience participation changed with the growth of technology and the internet. Social media provided a technique for the audience to fully engage in a narrative (Guo & Chan-

Olmsted, 2015). Social media allowed audience members to interact with one another as well as

content creators, and it allowed that communication to occur simultaneously and in real time.

Audiences can now comment within seconds of any scene in a narrative. Additionally, new tools

allowed audiences to create their own narrative-specific content (memes, GIFs, short burst

videos, etc.) and to distribute their messages across the globe. Communication between the

audience and creators became two-sided interactivity among all parties.

This two-side approach led to a contemporary, more robust, definition of audience

engagement. Audience engagement strategies are how content creators encourage audiences to

become active participants rather than simply viewers. The phenomenon occurs with books,

serials, television, movies, and online content. The interactive nature of engagement online

created a technique for the audience to become involved in a narrative. A more connected

audience resulted in more popularity of the narrative, improving the chances of content's

longevity.

Through concentrated examination of audience engagement, its strategies and its

nuances, creators gain a better understanding of which strategies are most effective in engaging

audiences. The more effectively the strategies built into the content, the higher the engagement,

thus creating more popularity and commercial value. With more content creation on the internet

and newer communication methods, researchers have the opportunity to continue to create new

and stronger audience engagement strategies. These strategies resulted in two types of audience

responses – social viewing and user generated content.

Social Viewing

With the emergence of social media, research began to identify new strategies for

audience engagement for traditional shows as well as for online content (Paek et al., 2013;

Ashley & Tuten, 2014; Wang, 2014; Giglietto et al., 2015; Guo & Chan Olmsted, 2015; Ji, 2017; Guo, 2018; Pande & Sharma, 2018). Strategies developed from different types of interactions on Twitter, Facebook, and in some cases YouTube between audience members, creators, and other industry professionals. Social media platforms provided the space for the interactions to take place. Tweeting, the act of posting on Twitter, became even more user-friendly with cell phone apps and smart TVs that streamlined viewing and engagement simultaneously (Ji, 2017). Live-tweeting developed through these applications. Live-tweeting happened when audiences posted tweets as they watched anything from sporting events, shows, movies or even the Oscar ceremonies (Wang, 2014; Ji, 2017).

One of the more popular approaches used for examining two-sided audience engagement was social television (Paek, Hove & Jeon, 2013; Giglietto, Artieri, Gemini & Orefice 2015; Guo & Chan-Olmsted, 2015; Ji, 2017). Ji (2017) described social television as the audience using social media platforms to react in real time to a show or movie, typically using Twitter or Facebook posts. Guo and Chan-Olmsted (2015) suggested three major components of social television: the audience, the media, and the content. The audience were those viewing the content, the media those creating/promoting the content, and the content as the narrative itself.

Content created by users was the predominant theme of research conducted thus far. Ashley and Tuten (2014) examined engagement strategies on social media that related to advertisements. They identified several strategies used including but not limited to type of message, asking audiences for input, and how the advertisements aired. Guo and Chan-Olmsted (2015) predicted behaviors of audience engagement on social media as it related to television. Paek et al., (2019) investigated message sensation values of YouTube videos to examine if the message sensation values influenced the audience reactions to the content. Wang (2014) used

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YouTube to examine user motivations through user-generated content. Thus far, the study of

audience engagement strategies from this research did not focus on user-generated content.

User-Generated Content

Based heavily on traditional television content and social television, audience

engagement research rarely focused on content that originated online. Even Paek et al., (2013)

and Wang (2014) focused their research on content posted on YouTube after originally debuting

through other media. Platforms such as YouTube required a more conscious effort from users.

While Twitter provided a micro-blogging site that allowed for immediate posts and responses,

YouTube created the ability for audiences to comment, to like, and to subscribe to videos

uploaded to the internet. The digital video sharing platform enabled viewers to post response

videos to one another as well as to the original content creators inexpensively (Paek et al., 2013).

This produced a sense of interactivity allowing the audience to engage in a narrative; similar to

the idea of social television (Paek et al., 2013; Wang, 2014; Guo & Chan-Olmsted, 2015).

Vlogs

With 500 hours of content posted on YouTube every minute, the rate of new content was

higher than ever (Clements, 2019). Wang (2014) argued blogging was an important motivation

for audiences and this same motivation could be applied to video blogs (vlogs) on YouTube or

other user-generated content (UGC). Vlog, or video blogs are a method in which creators and

viewers film their opinions, reactions, or other thoughts directly to the camera and then post on a

video-sharing sight (Zhang, 2019).

Study

The basis of this study was to examine if the audience engagement strategies used for marketing/advertising and traditional television also occurred in the online content of successful vlogs. The vlog chosen for examination was *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* on the YouTube platform.

The Lizzie Bennet Diaries

The Lizzie Bennet Diaries (LBD) is a modern-day retelling of Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice.* The series was one of the first of its kind to redesign a classic novel into a digital and interactive format. LBD followed the original plotline of Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, while not only adapting it to a more contemporary version, but also the digital media format (Tepper, 2012). In this version of *Pride and Prejudice*, Lizzie Bennet was a mass communication graduate student studying YouTube by immersing herself into the vlogging culture. The web-series premiered on YouTube as twice a week videos over the course of one year.

The vlog-style series invited the audience to integrate themselves into the narrative. Andersen (2013) said that while audiences did not affect the original story, the community created by the format gave audiences the ability to connect with each other and with the characters through not just the videos but on other social media platforms. While the vlog was the main method of storytelling, other social media platforms played a role in the complete storyline. Other platforms included Twitter, Tumblr, and Facebook where the characters frequently interacted with each other as well as with the viewers.

In 2014, the series had over 60 million views since its debut in 2012 and the Lizzie Bennet YouTube channel had over 249,000 subscribers (Ng, 2014), a number that increased with a rerelease of the videos on YouTube for the LBD five-year anniversary and release of the series on DVD. The series won a Primetime Emmy award in 2013 for Outstanding Creative Achievement in Interactive Media – Original Interactive Program (Pemberley Digital 2020).

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Audience engagement strategies appeared throughout the course of the story. The vlog format allowed the strategies to blend into the storyline. The characters used the strategies to encourage the audience to engage. This engagement by the audience was a crucial part of the successful implementation of the series. The interactivity of the series and the use of vlogs makes LBD an excellent illustration for the examination of audience engagement strategies.

Content Analysis

A content analysis approach was chosen to showcase patterns of audience engagement strategies that emerged in LBD. The analysis also allowed for the exhibition of context/purpose of the strategies within the vlog format. As LBD was one of the first retellings of its kind, it presents a unique opportunity to combine qualitative and quantitative data within the category of new interactive online content.

This thesis includes the following chapters: Chapter 1 introduction, Chapter 2 literature review and research questions, Chapter 3 the methodology, Chapter 4 the results, and Chapter 5 discussion of results and their implications.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Audience Engagement

Audience engagement is the interactivity between members of the audience and content creators. Over time, this shifted from one-sided (linear) participation to a two-sided (interactive) engagement. This shift moved from letter writing, fan fiction, and fan meet ups to real time interaction via Twitter, Facebook, other social sharing sites and international distribution of user-generated content. The shift increased the need for further research of audience engagement strategies.

Social Viewing Strategies

The strategies used in audience engagement methods presented themselves in a variety of ways. Ashley and Tuten (2014) examined the types of creative strategies used through Facebook/MySpace, Twitter, blogs/forums, and video/photo sharing sites in the context of audience engagement for advertising and branding purposes. They developed criteria to examine which strategies commonly appeared by these specific platforms to develop the best means to engage the audience. The strategies further divided into subcategories which focused on messaging strategies for advertising campaigns. They included, but are not limited to, (1) interactivity – or the amount the audience could interact with the campaign, (2) functional appeals defined as informational messages and (3) emotional appeals – psychological or social needs that make the audience feel some emotion. They found that functional appeals, in short message bursts, using sites such as Facebook or Twitter, appeared the most in common brand strategies. Campaigns that coupled informational messages with requests for audience input enjoyed higher levels of audience engagement. While Ashley and Tuten (2014) explored

strategies on social media that applied to branding in advertisements for corporations, many of the strategies also applied to other forms of content.

Guo and Chan-Olmsted (2015) used the concept of the connectedness construct to define audience engagement to explain the relationship between television viewers and television programs/characters. They defined the connectedness construct as ''the level of intensity of the relationship(s) that a viewer develops with the characters and contextual settings of a program in the parasocial television environment" (Guo & Chan-Olmsted, 2015, p. 241). Audiences were more likely to create a relationship with a program if they could connect to the characters or narrative in some fashion. Guo and Chan-Olmsted identified factors that lead audiences to engage in a television show or live event via social media through a content analysis of audience motives, social characteristics, and message innovation through analysis of Twitter messages. Guo and Chan-Olmsted's findings indicated that the perceived quality of the show predicted the frequency of audience engagement. By identifying specific aspects of the content, Guo and Chan-Olmsted pinpointed which stories and characters audience members related to the most. This allowed them to predict audience engagement behavior.

Similarly, Ji (2017) coined the term "social TV," defining it as the relationship between live-posting and viewer enjoyment. Ji analyzed both perceived enjoyment of the shows chosen (e.g. *Battle Creek* and *Survivor*) as well as the type and tone of tweet. The tweets perceived to be more positive or neutral had higher enjoyment frequencies, and therefore the audience was more likely to continue to engage. Ji concluded that audience engagement in social TV must be investigated by both type and tone to understand audience enjoyment.

Guo (2018) explored the use of dimensions to examine engagement (e.g., vertical involvement, diagonal interaction, horizontal intimacy & horizontal influence). Guo claimed

each dimension built upon the previous one beginning with vertical involvement through horizontal influence. Vertical involvement was one-way participatory interaction on social media by the audience. This dimension included comments or reactions posted on Twitter and was the first step in the dimensional ladder. The second step was diagonal interaction, which was the communication between the audience and creators (e.g., actors and viewers tweeting each other). Guo described horizontal intimacy, the third level in the dimensional model, as the measure of the emotional response of the viewer. He measured this type of response via a survey of emotional reactions to the programs. Horizontal influence was the fourth step that involved peer-to-peer interaction as well as the audience's sense of belonging to a specific group of supporters. Horizontal intimacy and horizontal influence differed because intimacy measured emotional response whereas, influence examined the interaction of the audience and their support for a program. Guo determined that out of the four dimensions, horizontal influence was the dimension that engaged the audience most effectively.

Guo's dimensions provided a framework to explain relationships between the content, the creators, and the audience. These relationships continued to be crucial in choosing audience engagement strategies that most effectively engage the audience. As with Guo & Chan-Olmsted (2015), the more an audience related to the content, the more likely they were to engage. Guo (2018) explored the relationships through his four identified dimensions to create a multi-level and multipurpose outline for content creators to use in developing new engagement strategies.

Giglietto et al. (2016), similar to Guo and Chan-Olmsted (2015), found that quality of content based on the audience's judgment was a key factor in determining effective strategies. Giglietto et al. analyzed the moments in which Twitter engagement peaked during the Italian version of *XFactor* and what was known as *Servizio Pubblico*, a weekly political talk show in

Italy. These peaks tended to happen in moments of surprise or suspense. They concluded that the peak moments of audience engagement came from the perceived quality of content presented in the program. The perceived quality built the connection between the narrative and the audience, thus again making the argument that the more the audience connected to the content, the higher the level of engagement. Giglietto et al. and Guo & Chan-Olmsted used their strategies to study audience engagement with television programs, but neither used their approaches to study online program content.

Ciacu and Tănase (2012) bridged this gap between traditional television and online content by comparing traditional measures of program ratings (Nielsen equivalents) and internet viewership of online shows over the course of a year. They found that audiences tended to generate user content on Facebook more frequently after watching online programming as opposed to television programming. Ciacu and Tănase observed that as internet programming audiences increased, both audience fragmentation (audiences self-dividing into smaller groups than those who watch network television) and audience segmentation (content creators' ability to tailor programming to interested parties) increased. Ciacu and Tănase concluded that more of the audience began to use social media to engage with a program as the internet gained popularity in Romania. This also led to the migration to viewing programs on online platforms.

User-Generated Content on YouTube

Thus far, audience engagement research of original YouTube content had limited information (Wang, 2014). YouTube is a video sharing platform where anyone can create original content or share thoughts and opinions on existing content. Video sharing sites are another way for audiences to share in the experience of the story (Wang). Twitter and Facebook have more common ways of sharing through microblogging, where users post short updates for

their followers. Brands and corporations use these sites to allow users to interact with company pages or representatives directly.

User-generated content (UGC) emphasizes the individual – highlighting a peer-to-peer interaction (Wang, 2014). While the text-based sites do have user generated content, YouTube provided an outlet where users shared videos, in addition to making comments or reactions. User-generated content on YouTube gave users more freedom, not confined to the regulations of current TV media.

Wang (2014) commented on the lack of research on user-generated content (UGC) through YouTube. He also observed user motivations, involvement in UGC, gratifications and innovation orientations of YouTube users in Taiwan. Wang predicted that users shared videos to build a sense of self on a platform where users were also the content creators. Wang suggested that user motivations were the same or at least similar for both online content and traditional television. This distinction he made between the two was the level of gratification users gained. He found that because video sharing sites tended to be more interactive, users got higher levels of gratification while viewing online content. This gave an additional incentive for audiences to use video sharing sites for creating their online content, including self-branding.

Wang (2014) confirmed the need for further research on how user motivations differ with online content as opposed to traditional television. Past research of traditional television indicated motivations predicted audience engagement behaviors. The ability to predict these behaviors in the same way for online content directed development of new online engagement strategies.

Ashley and Tuten (2014), in addition to their exploration of branded content, examined specific strategies for user-generated content. They used the following strategies to measure

engagement with UGC: (1) Invitation to submit content including but not limited to comments, captions, videos, pictures; (2) Incentives to submit content where viewers are given an motivation to engage such as a prize in a contest; (3) Ability to rank/vote on content from others; (4) Ability to interact with or comment on content which refers to viewers having the ability to use other platforms to engage with other viewers or the creators. Ashley and Tuten's findings determined that the strategies from video sharing sites held a higher significance to branding campaigns when companies used invitations to submit content with incentives. This conclusion meant that when creators asked audiences to give feedback or when creators gave audiences incentives to provide feedback, engagement levels were stronger.

Paek et al., (2012) concluded that many of the assumptions related to audience engagement came from social adaptation theory and the source attractiveness model. The social adaptation theory suggested that people accept the message that matched their previous expectations before viewing. The source attractiveness model proposed that people view the source of the message as more attractive when it reinforced their previous values. These two theories led Paek et al. to create a study that concluded audiences are more likely to engage with content and perceive speakers as more attractive if the content reinforced beliefs already held by the audience. Paek et al. determined that YouTube content had more favorable responses if the videos had message sensation value (MSV) that resonated with the audience. Message sensation values were any sensory, affective, or arousal responses elicited from music, visuals, lighting, or other film trade practices. By using MSV that utilized social adaptation theory and the source attractiveness model, creators had the ability to tailor strategies to increase audience engagement.

Researchers examined YouTube content that contained many different variables of audience engagement strategies. Pande and Sharma (2018) explored the use of top-viewed video

clips to see the popularity of YouTube videos had on promotions of the sports community. Their

criteria included length of video, elements of promotion and categorizations of bizarre and

popular videos in their selected sample. They observed the clips to find which pieces of criteria

were most common in the videos. Their findings showed that the viral YouTube videos were

promotional or informational in nature, matching similar appeals to those observed by Ashley

and Tuten (2014). Pande and Sharma considered the views to be a form of audience engagement.

Looking at these criteria allowed Pande and Sharma to create a baseline of what makes online

content popular. Based on the work of Guo and Chan-Olmsted (2015) and Giglietto et al. (2016),

the criteria that increased popularity of content should also result in higher levels of audience

engagement.

Vlogs

One method of UGC on YouTube is vlogging or video blogging. Zhang (2019) defined

video blogging as a type of blog in which users' film themselves for other viewers. In general,

blogs were written materials. Vlogging, however, gave the audience the opportunity to see into

the creator's world. This occurred through live-streaming or as a pre-recorded, scripted video.

Vlogs can be anything from DIY videos to product reviews (Munnukka, Maityb, Reinikainen, &

Luoma-aho, 2018). Munnukka et al. indicated that audience engagement in vlogs could be

anything from comments/likes to channel subscriptions. They defined these activities as active

engagement. This engagement included the characteristics such as vividness of the video and

interactivity allowed, both which influenced viewers. Munnukka et al. also indicated that the

more interaction with viewers, the more connected they feel to the vlogger (someone who vlogs),

their content, and the community created by vlog. They determined that the relationship was

important because the interactivity led to personal relationships between vloggers and individual

members of their audience. These relationships allowed audiences to create a stronger connection and were therefore more likely to engage.

Vlogs provided an example of content on YouTube not explored in the scope of online content. Vlogging gave content creators a unique method to approach the audience in a way that was not possible with traditional television or other social media. Vlogs allowed for creators to directly address their audience in a video format. The question this study analyzed was whether the strategies for traditional television content occurred in vlogs, particularly in the example of *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries*.

The Lizzie Bennet Diaries

The Lizzie Bennet Diaries (LBD) is modern day retelling that included the audience in the story using the vlogging format. In this version of *Pride and Prejudice*, Lizzie Bennet was a mass communication graduate student studying YouTube by immersing herself into the vlogging culture. The web-series debuted on YouTube as twice a week videos over the course of one year. LBD followed the original plotline of Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*, while not only adapting it to a more contemporary version, but also the digital media format (Tepper, 2012).

In using a web-series that was the first of its kind, LBD allowed for an examination of engagement strategies on YouTube. The vlogging format allowed the content creators to intertwine strategies directly into the story. In addition to using the vlog format, the story and the characters developed on other platforms such as Twitter giving LBD an innovative, new approach to online storytelling.

The purpose of this study was to find audience engagement strategies within the series and in what ways they occurred. A content analysis was chosen to identify patterns which

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emerged and how writers used strategies to engage their audience within the context of a vlog telling a fictional story.

The strategies for analysis originated from past research which focused on traditional television content and user-generated content. The strategies identified included (1) directly addressing viewers (Ashley & Tuten, 2014; Guo & Chan-Olmsted, 2015; Pande & Sharma 2018); (2) mentions of the vlog itself (Wang, 2014); (3) mentions of the internet/YouTube (Pande & Sharma 2018); (4) asking the audience for input (Ashley & Tuten, 2014;); and (5) mentions audience input within the vlog (Ashley & Tuten, 2014; Guo & Chan-Olmsted, 2015) Therefore, researchers posed the following research questions:

RQ1: Which of the five identified audience engagement strategies occurred in The Lizzie Bennet Diaries?

RQ2: With what frequency were these strategies used?

RQ3: For what context/purpose were these strategies used?

<center>**Chapter 3: Methodology**</center>

Researchers used the following methodologies to analyze the research questions.

Sample

The content analysis of *The Lizzie Bennet Diaries* playlist excluded *The Complete Lizzie Bennet Diaries* and all other videos posted by the *Lizzie Bennet* YouTube channel. The sample playlist contained 100 episodes, first posted between March 2012 and March 2013. The 20 episodes selected for analysis using a random number generator (calculator.net) were 2, 4, 11, 15, 19, 34, 46, 49, 51, 55, 58, 61, 62, 66, 69, 71, 78, 81, 98, and 100 and created approximately 84 minutes of programming. The number of episodes chosen represented 20% of the total episodes in the playlist.

Procedure

To find the identified audience engagement strategies and their frequencies in the series, researchers conducted a content analysis to examine the LBD sample. A content analysis helped pinpoint patterns existing in the series. Strategies included the following definitions.

Strategies

Viewers are Addressed Directly. This strategy included when any character spoke directly to the audience within the storyline. Zhang (2019) said that by addressing the audience in a vlog, the creators acknowledged the audience contribution as a viewer. The vlogger, for example, began the vlog saying "I have missed all you viewers since my last video."

Vlog Mentions. The second strategy was any occurrence where a character refers to the vlog itself or to Lizzie's diaries. This category brings attention to the format of the story setting and the self-awareness of the characters that they are in a vlog. For YouTube, as one of the more popular platforms to host vlogging, strategies two and three required separate categories for

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examination and clarity of data (Wang, 2014). Examples included vloggers saying "Here on my vlog" or "In these videos, I will recommend my favorite products…."

References to YouTube/Internet. The third strategy identified anytime any character mentioned YouTube within the vlog. Due to the nature of the vlogging format, all mentions of YouTube and the Internet counted as defining the characters' awareness of the story presentation to the audience. The format identified the modernization of this retelling using the video blog format and the unique ways it does or does not engage the YouTube viewers, already defined as the audience (Wang, 2014; Guo & Chan-Olmsted, 2015; Guo, 2018). Vloggers in this case may mention the idea of the format that YouTube provided to create their vlog, "On my YouTube channel, you'll find several tutorials for home improvements…."

Viewers Asked for Input. This strategy examined any time characters asked viewers (audience) directly for input, comments, or other any requests made by the characters. This strategy, derived from Ashley and Tuten (2014), measured when brands asked for comments or input from viewers and from also derived te Walvaart et al. (2018), who asked producers for feedback from viewers. This happened when vloggers ask their viewers to specifically answer a question in the comments such as "What are all your thoughts on these products? Let me know in the comments below."

Mentioning Viewer Input within the Videos. The final strategy involved any time a character used a direct comment from a viewer and mentioned it within the vlog, or by using third person, brought attention to the viewer but did not address the viewer directly. Similar to asking viewers for input, Ashley and Tuten (2014) measured the times brands used viewer input in the marketing campaigns such as mentioning past reviews on products for example: "I saw all your comments mentioning your favorite products I've reviewed so far."

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Context/Purpose

Three categories noted the context/purpose of the strategies. The context/purpose information related to the identified strategies and included the sub-categories of adaptation, background, or plot information. The context/purpose of these categories appeared in concurrence of the identified audience engagement strategies. The characters of the narrative determined if the context/purpose of the engagement had any effect on the story. Effect was determined by characters noting within the vlog that the information was relevant to either the vlog adaptation, background information of the story, or any plot information from the storyline.

Adaptation. Adaptation, noted as "A," referred to information related to the adaptation of the vlog format. Adaptation information specifically referenced moments possible only in a vlog format such as self-references to the videos or vlogs. An example of adaptation information was when Lizzie hypothetically posited the idea of using an episode of her in her pajamas to invoke a new internet meme.

Background Information. Background information, recorded as "B," referenced expositional information necessary to the story that the characters told the audience such as information on Lizzie's family that did not appear on camera at any time. Episode 2 of LBD: "My Sisters: Problematic to Practically Perfect" held several examples of Lizzie presenting information about her sisters, their ages, their current jobs, and relationship statuses.

Plot Information. Plot information, recorded as "P," gave information that was relevant to the plotline that followed the original *Pride and Prejudice* such as when Lizzie learned she would be visiting Pemberley Digital which she learned from viewer's comments. An example of plot information included in episode 62 when Lizzie stated she was not going to share the

contents of Darcy's letter, which according to her, went against all previously established principles of sharing on her vlog.

Coding

The coding book (Appendix A) defined all recorded items as listed above. The coding sheet (Appendix B) documented that data collection tool for the strategies as well as the context/purpose information used for the 20-episode sample. The coding sheet included: the episode number, the time stamp, the strategies used, which character presented or said the information, the number of times that particular strategy occurred in a single video, what was the context of comment and if that context influenced the narrative, as determined by the character stating during the video it did. It also included the number of views the episode had at the time of analysis.

Data Analysis

Three crosstab procedures were used to compare and analyze the data. The first focused on the frequencies of the identified strategies. The second analyzed breakdowns of character usage of the strategies. The third procedure looked at how the strategies used context/purpose information (A, B, P) and if the information affected the narrative according to the characters in the vlog.

Chapter 4: Results

The research questions posed inquiries on strategies used to engage the audience and the frequencies at which they appeared. The analysis also recorded the context of the strategies. The following represented the results of the content analysis. Result tables listed in Appendixes C-E laid out frequencies of strategies and context as defined in Chapter 3.

Research Question 1

Research question 1 asked how often the five identified strategies occurred. The strategies included (1) *addressing viewers directly*, (2) *mentions of the vlog*, (3) *references to YouTube or the internet as a platform*, (4) *viewers asked for input*, and (5) *viewer's input being used or mentioned within the vlog*. Table 1 displayed the results (Appendix C). Four out of the five strategies consisted of 110 occurrences in 84 minutes of the 20-episode sample of LBD. The two most common strategies appeared 46 times each. They were *viewers addressed directly* and *vlog mentions.* The two strategies combined 83.6% of all observed strategy occurrences.

Viewers addressed directly appeared in 17 of 20 episodes (85% of episodes). The *vlog mentions* appeared in 14 episodes (70% of episodes). *Viewer input mentioned* occurred within the videos 12.7% (n=14) in five episodes. *YouTube or mentions of the internet* totaled four times (n=4), 3.6% in four episodes. The strategy of *asking the viewers for input* was not present in the sample. Every episode analyzed in the sample used at least one of the identified strategies except the strategy of asking viewers for input.

Research Question 2

Research Question 2 asked at what frequencies the strategies occurred and which character used them. Data on screen time for each character was not included in the criteria for findings. Table 2 (Appendix D) listed the number of times each character used each of the

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strategies. In total, Lizzie used the strategies the most often with 65 recorded usages, 59% of the total. Charlotte was the character who used these strategies with the second highest frequency at 18% with 20 occurrences. Jane followed with seven uses, or 6%. Lydia recorded five uses of the strategies for 4%. Darcy and Gigi each used three strategies, for 2.7% each. Both Ricky and George applied the strategies twice, or 1% of the total occurrences. Bing used only one strategy within the twenty episodes.

Table 2 (Appendix D) also documented the breakdown of which strategies the characters used most often. The strategy of *viewers addressed* by individual characters was: Lizzie 69% (n=32), Charlotte 23% (n=11), Jane 4% (n=2), George 4% (n=2) and Lydia 2% (n=1). Eight of the characters used the strategy of *vlog mentions*. Lizzie mentioned it the most frequently, 32% (n=21). Other characters using this strategy were Charlotte 8% (n=4), Jane 8% (n=4), Lydia 8% (n=4), Darcy 6% (n=3), Gigi with 6% (n=3), Ricky 2% (n=1) and George 2% (n=1). *YouTube or the Internet* mentioned strategy occurred in the vlog four times. Lizzie mentioned it twice (50%), Jane once (25%), & Ricky once (25%). *Viewer input mentioned in the vlogs* occurred as a strategy of audience engagement by Lizzie 71% (n=10), and Charlotte 35% (n=5), with the total number of uses (n=14) with one occurrence used in tandem by both Lizzie and Charlotte.

Research Question 3

Research Question 3 asked for what context/purpose were the audience engagement strategies used in the vlog. Table 3 (Appendix E) listed the frequencies of the context/purpose information which occurred in conjunction with the engagement strategies and the character noted if the information had any effect on the story as mentioned by the characters in the episodes. The three categories were adaptation, recorded a total of 19 times; background information recorded four times; and plot information recorded a total of 16 times. At times,

multiple examples of these categories occurred in a single episode. The context/purpose information occurred in concurrence with the identified audience engagement strategies recorded in Table 1 (Appendix C).

The strategy of *addressing viewers directly* recorded context/purpose information in 17 of 20 episodes. Adaptational information and background information occurred three times each, while plot information occurred six times in relation to the *addressing viewers directly* strategy. Only five of the occurrences of context/purpose information influenced the storyline as stated by the characters when used within the strategy of *directly addressing the audience*.

Vlog mentions recorded a total of 18 instances of context/purpose information and occurred within 11 of 20 episodes. Nine occurrences were adaptational, one was background information, and eight held plot information. Seven of 18 the context/purpose uses of the strategy of *vlog mentions* had some effect on the story.

YouTube or internet mentions registered with two adaptational occurrences and one plot related. None had any effect on the story within the 20 episodes. *Viewer input mentioned* in the vlogs had five adaptational mentions, one background information and one plot mention in four of 20 episodes. Two of these occurrences influenced the story as determined by the characters.

Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusion

The first research question addressed in this thesis was whether audience engagement strategies identified from other media were present in the vlog LBD. Four out of the five strategies appeared in LBD. The implication is that strategies from other forms of media were transferable to online narrative content. Surprisingly, Ashley and Tuten's (2014) strategy of *asking for viewer input* did not appear in the sample. However, the sample made multiple references to responding to viewer feedback. This occurred in episode 62, when Lizzie mentioned that many of the viewers asked for her to share the contents of Darcy's letter given to Lizzie in the previous episode. Lizzie told the audience their input was necessary – without their encouragement she may not have been compelled to share. This strategy appeared seven times in the final episode alone. The episode finalized the year-long story of the vlogs in which Lizzie said that without the viewers, the vlogs would not have been possible. Lizzie concluded the video by thanking the viewers for watching and engaging with her through the course of her vlog. Although Lizzie did not mention any specific information from viewers, she shared that they contributed many times throughout the diaries.

This suggested three possible options: the show generated viewer feedback without using the strategy; the strategy appeared in episodes not included in the sample; or the content creators included fictional feedback in developing the story. Out of those three options, the first may provide the best explanation. It seems unlikely that the show failed to generate any viewer feedback, and it also seems unlikely that the sample missed the strategy completely. However, the interactive method of storytelling gave viewers an opportunity to engage even when not asked for input. The characters used input from the audience in their dialogue, and although the

audience was not asked for the input, they felt enough of a connection to submit their opinions or thoughts.

The strategies that appeared in LBD included *directly addressing viewers*, *vlog mentions*, *YouTube/Internet mentions*, and *mentioning viewer input with the videos*. The first two strategies, *directly addressing viewers* and *referencing the vlog*, accounted for 83.6% of all observed strategy occurrences combined. Lizzie *addressed viewers directly* in 17 of 20 episodes. One example is when Lizzie welcomed them into her life, such as the moment when she said, "Internet, meet my sister, Jane" (Ep. 2, 1:35). In this instance, Lizzie called her viewers by the general term of "internet." Another strategy, *mentioning the vlog*, occurred in 14 of 20 episodes. Lizzie reminded her viewers that they were able to see moments of her life that would not be as dynamic in a regular blog setting. One example of this was when Lizzie mentions the views on the video of George "You would not believe the views I got on that video…" (Ep. 49, 1:38). In this episode Lydia spilled a cup of water on George and he had to take off his shirt. Lizzie stated during the episode her viewers highly appreciated that moment

These first two strategies, when used together, reminded viewers that this was a constructed retelling, but also an interactive one in which their engagement was important to the story. LBD took strategies from different media and combined them to create a story that gave the audience the experience as if they were truly characters in this *Pride and Prejudice* retelling. The relationship demonstrated the two-way engagement available through a vlog narrative format, an interactive alternative to traditional one-way engagement. These two strategies allowed the audience and Lizzie to form a give and take relationship with viewers. This built a rapport with the audience. The story gave the audience a chance to connect on an individual level as any effective story creation should to intentionally engage its audience.

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Combining the two strategies was similar to the dimensions of Guo (2018). The combination built a stronger sense of immersion for the audience. It was a deliberate attempt to engage the audience. Lizzie's actions in the vlogs followed the idea of the dimensions when the audience engaged more as the creator encouraged them to through these strategies. An intention meant to highlight the reciprocity of the relationship between Lizzie and her viewers. Vertical involvement (Guo, 2018), for example, was the interaction between the viewers and the program which appeared in LBD when the strategy of *mentions of the vlog* occurred. Diagonal interaction which described the interaction between the characters and viewers such as the direct addresses seen in LBD. The strategies worked in conjunction with each other to create the relationship between the vlogger and the audience. For example, Lizzie used them together to address her audience and her videos saying "…but one of the bright spots has definitely been making these videos and getting to know all of you..." (Ep. 66, 1:23). This quote highlights the nature of the vlog format, the ability to directly address the audience, and the interaction that Lizzie and her viewers experienced up to that point in the diaries.

The other strategies included *mentions of YouTube/internet and mentions of viewer input within the vlog*. These two strategies did not appear as often as the first two. *Mentions of YouTube/Internet* appeared in 4 episodes (3.6%) and mentions of viewer input occurred in 5 episodes (12.7%). Reminding viewers, they were watching a YouTube series allowed the program to distinguish itself from other forms of media. On a platform such as YouTube, where creators are the users and users are creators, this strategy invited viewers to take advantage of YouTube's visual interactions. *Mentioning viewer input* was discussed earlier.

The second research question addressed the use of audience engagement strategies by characters, a concept that is far more important in a narrative vlog than in a nonfiction vlog or a

single person vlog. The use of characters is a new concept since previous research only examined

nonfictional content, branding strategies, or marketing approaches without characters. The

results showed that while Lizzie was the character that used the strategies the most at 59% of the

time. Charlotte's frequency of use was second, at 18%, and seven other characters combined for

the remaining 23%. This was important to note because of the narrative of this vlog. The

interactive retelling of *Pride and Prejudice* gave the audience a chance to participate and engage

with specific characters. Secondly, the vlog allowed for multiple characters to engage the

audience. This gave the audience the opportunity to see and hear other character's thoughts and

perspectives, a concept in novels that tends to not occur.

Charlotte was also in the videos for a significant portion of time as she and Lizzie worked

together on the vlog. In episode 15 for example, Charlotte and Jane (Lizzie's sister) take over an

episode of the vlog to clarify how Lizzie presented her life to her viewers. They directly

addressed the audience several times and Jane reminded the audience that it is Lizzie's video

blog and "Lizzie sees what Lizzie sees…." Charlotte and Jane tried to give the audience a piece

of the story that they do not get to hear from Lizzie's point of view.

The different characters in the videos let the audiences form their own opinions about

them, instead of just hearing from Lizzie's perspective – a common theme for vloggers. This also

suggested that engagement strategies can be used by anyone in the vlog, not just the main

character or vlogger. In LBD, the audience can see and hear from the characters allowing them to

connect to many different characters. As stated previously, the more an audience connects to a

subject the more their engagement increases. Even more importantly, the implications of the

characters using these engagement strategies gave insight for future vloggers that guests in vlogs

may give the audience another chance to connect to the topic, whether they be narrative based or nonfictional.

The third research question addressed the importance of context/purpose of how the strategies appeared in a narrative vlog. Any mentions of adaptation, background, or plot information in LBD gave the viewers the context/purpose they needed to know for the storyline. This created a relational effect between the context of the story and audience engagement. Although not previously considered as a strategy of audience engagement, this relationship between context/purpose and use of the strategies was significant as it showed a new way of using the strategies when producing new content. The relationship was central to the understanding how to apply the strategies within a storytelling narrative. The contextual information suggested the relationship between the context and narrative was a factor in the frequency that the strategies appeared in the vlog. Using the context/purpose information further built the relationship between the audience and the characters. Zhang (2018) found building the relationships in vlogging were key in receiving viewership. Lizzie built this relationship with her viewers as she stated in episode 66 when she spoke of what she had been most grateful for that year. She in this instance directly addressed the audience. This moment also provided an example of an instance that would be adaptation information to draw attention to the idea that she could not have built the relationship between Lizzie and her audience without the vlog format.

All the adaptation, background and plot information given by the characters allowed the audience to understand the narrative they watched was a construct of fiction that was important to understand how the strategies worked in this story. In this study, adaptation information appeared 19 times, plot information appeared 16 times, and background information four.

Adaptation information occurred because LBD is an adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice*, a classic novel. LBD adapted not only the story, but took the original setting and modernized it for contemporary audiences. Perhaps the dominance of plot information in relation to background information may provide an insight for those who wish to tell narratives in a vlog format. It is consistent with the peak engagement during moments of surprise or suspense (Giglietto et al., 2016).

The implications of this newly identified strategy of using context/purpose to create narrative vlogs was not seen in any previous research most of which came from other media (Ashley & Tuten, 2014; Guo & Chan-Olmsted, 2015; Ji, 2017) or focused on user motivations (Wang, 2014; Pande & Sharma, 2018). By approaching audience engagement through context/purpose rather than only measuring the appeals of messages (i.e. functional, emotional, etc.,), vloggers can learn what context the engagement strategies could apply to in their own content.

Limitations and Further Research

One limitation of this study was its focus on a retelling of a fictional narrative. It limited the ability to generalize the findings to different types of vlogs such as DIY vlogs, nonfictional narratives, and product reviewers. Future studies could examine how engagement strategies applied in those contexts to develop a more thorough understanding of vlogging audience engagement. Future studies could also include data on the screen time for each character to see who had the most opportunity to use the audience engagement strategies.

This study did not examine the effectiveness of the strategies on audience engagement by examining audience reaction to the strategies. Instead, the research featured a content analysis of the content creators' use and frequency of audience engagement strategies. Future research

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could examine audience reaction through comments, Tweets, Facebook posts, likes, reaction vlogs, and user generated content. Such research could provide insight into the effectiveness of these strategies in various contexts.

Conclusion

This study examined whether strategies found in previous research be applied to a vlog retelling of a fictional narrative. The results displayed the interactive nature of engaging the audience. The award-winning vlog, LBD, allowed for viewers to interact with not only the main character but additional characters. The research found four out of the five strategies were used. The main character was the most prominent user of the strategies. The strategies that appeared most often including viewers addressed directly and mentions of the vlog.

Additionally, two other factors emerged from the analysis particularly related to fictional narratives. The first factor was the use of characters in a narrative to deliver the strategies. The second was the importance of context/purpose for each strategy. These factors when combined with the strategies from previous research created a more thorough understanding of the contexts in which audience engagement strategies applied.

The study provides analysis of strategies for content creators in using vlogs. The use of these strategies could increase the interactivity and involvement created an affinity between the creators, their content, and the audience.

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Appendices

Coding Book

Table 1. List of Sample Episodes

Episode Number	Episode Title	Run Time	Number of Viewer Comments
Episode 2	My Sisters…Problematic to Practically Perfect https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6Yq7aJ2uVBg	3:35	1,814
Episode 4	Bing Lee and His 500 Teenage Prostitutes https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2KjOskZJEAc	3:21	1,159
Episode 11	The Charming Mr. Lee https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4I_Vaw9MbOI	2:41	532
Episode 15	Lizzie Bennet is in Denial https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9X68-knFQ3c	3:41	1,127
Episode 19	The Green Bean Gelatin Plan https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ce_URjhJ3Xs	4:39	779
Episode 34	Lizzie, Come Home https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rKr1KWax6VE	5:13	899
Episode 46	Birthday Party Battle Plan https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=McArA9yDMxA	4:02	1,655
Episode 49	Not Paranoid https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j2EPa9-8kuU&t	3:38	1,484
Episode 51	Together Again https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lMa5Oi44SwE	4:33	982
Episode 55	Robot Surprise https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pCaUHUQ_5WM	4:51	1,644
Episode 58	Care Packages https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LuPegu56xrY	4:59	1,867
Episode 61	Yeah…I Know https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rlZ86QA9Qro	4:20	3,106

Episode 62	Letter Analysis https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QTS60Gll1HQ	4:25	1,254
Episode 66	Giving Thanks https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5GJDBBD_-D0	3:54	726
Episode 69	Summer Friends https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jIDrWqN5fAw	4:03	1,635
Episode 71	Mr. Bennet's Christmas Train Extravaganza https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9q9il_51oZI	4:02	1,227
Episode 78	The Lizzie Trap https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jV8EZWJNvRI	5:00	5,942
Episode 98	Gratitude https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9ncnZjwF50k	6:10	10,964
Episode 100	The End https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Kh5AcIAP6iU	5:04	4,741

Figure 1. Coding

Episode Number	Ep. 2	Ep. 4	Ep. 11	Ep. 15	Ep. 19	Ep. 34	Ep. 46	Ep. 49	Ep. 51	Ep. 55
Viewers Addressed Directly	1	1	0	3	2	1	1	3	1	1
Character	LiB	LiB		JB/CL(2)	LiB(2)	LiB	GW	LiB/JB/GW	LiB	LiB
Context				B/P	B					
Impact	N	N		Y	N	N	N	N	N	N
Vlog Mentions	4	1	1	1	0	0	0	1	6	0
Character	LiB	LiB	CL	JB				LiB	LiB(3)/CL (2)/RC	
Context	B/P			P/A				A	A	
Impact	N	N	N	N				Y	N	
Internet/YouTube Mentions	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1	0
Character					LiB				RC	
Context					A					
Impact					N				N	
Viewers Asked for Input	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Character										
Context										
Impact										
Viewers Input Mentioned	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	0
Character					LiB					
Context					A					
Impact					N					

Figure 1. Con't

Episode Number	Ep. 58	Ep. 61	Ep. 62	Ep. 66	Ep. 69	Ep. 71	Ep. 78	Ep. 81	Ep. 98	Ep. 100	TOTALS
Viewers Addressed Directly	1	2	5	8	5	1	0	0	3	7	46
Character	LiB	LiB	LiB (4)/ CL	LiB(7)/ CL	LyB	LiB			LiB	LiB(5)/CL (2)	
Context		P (2)	P	A	B/P/A				P	A	
Impact	N	N	Y	Y	N	N			Y	Y	
Vlog Mentions	2	4	2	0	7	0	4	3	5	5	46
Character	LiB	LiB/CL/WD (2)	LiB		LyB(4)/JB(3)		LiB(2)/GD(2)	LiB/GD/BL	WD	LiB	
Context	A/P	A/P	P				A/P	A/P	A/P	A	
Impact	N	Y	Y				Y	Y	Y	Y	
Internet/YouTube Mentions	0	0	0	1	1	1	0	0	0	0	4
Character				LiB	JB						
Context				P	A						
Impact				N	N						
Viewers Asked for Input	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Character											
Context											
Impact											
Viewers Input Mentioned	1	0	4	1	0	0	0	0	0	7	14
Character	LiB		CL(4)/LiB	LiB						LiB(6)/CL	
Context	A		A/P/B	A						A	
Impact			Y	N						Y	

Definitions of Strategies

      Viewers are Addressed Directly. This strategy included when any character spoke directly to the audience within the storyline. Zhang (2019) said that by addressing the audience in a vlog, the creators acknowledged the audience contribution as a viewer.

      Vlog Mentions. The second strategy was any occurrence where a character refers to the vlog itself or to Lizzie's diaries. This category brings attention to the format of the story setting and the self-awareness of the characters that they are in a vlog. YouTube as one of the more popular platforms to host vlogging, strategies two and three required separate categories for examination and clarity of data (Wang, 2014).

      References to YouTube/Internet. The third strategy identified anytime any character mentioned YouTube within the vlog. Due to the nature of the vlogging format, all mentions of YouTube and the Internet counted as defining the characters' awareness of the story presentation to the audience. The format identified the modernization of this retelling using the video blog format and the unique ways it does or does not engage the YouTube viewers, already defined as the audience (Wang, 2014; Guo & Chan-Olmsted, 2015; Guo, 2018).

      Viewers Asked for Input. This strategy examined times characters asked viewers (audience) directly for input, comments, or other any requests made by the characters. This strategy, derived from Ashley and Tuten (2014), measured when brands asked for comments or input from viewers and from te Walvaart et al. (2018), who asked producers for feedback from viewers.

      Mentioning Viewer Input within the Videos. The final strategy involved any time a character used a direct comment from a viewer and mentioned it within the vlog, or by using third person, brought attention to the viewer but did not address the viewer directly.

Context/Purpose

  Adaptation. Adaptation, noted as "A," referred to information related to the adaptation of the vlog format. Adaptation information specifically referenced moments possible only in a vlog format such as self-references to the videos or vlogs.

  Background Information. Background information, recorded as "B," referenced expositional information necessary to the story that the characters told the audience such as information on Lizzie's family that did not appear on camera at any time.

  Plot Information. Plot information, recorded as "P," gave information that was relevant to the plotline that followed the original Pride and Prejudice such as when Lizzie learned she would be visiting Pemberley Digital which she learned from viewer's comments.

Coding Sheet

	Episode Number	Time Stamp	Character	How it used in context of the vlog (Background (B), Plot-related (P) or Adaptational (A)	Effect on story (According to characters) Y or N?
Viewers addressed directly					
Vlog itself is mentioned					
YouTube mentioned					
Viewers asked to give input/comments					
Viewers input used in the vlog					

Appendix C

Table 1. Frequencies of Strategies

Strategies	Number of Occurrences	
	Frequencies	Percentages
Viewers Directly Addressed	46	41.8%
Vlog Mentioned	46	41.8%
YouTube/Internet Mentioned	4	3.6%
Viewers Asked for Input	0	0%
Viewers Input Mentioned	14	12.7%

Note.

Appendix D

Table 3. Frequency of Strategy by Character

Strategies	Character	n	%	
		Occurrences		
Viewers Directly	Lizzie	32	69	
Addressed	Charlotte	11	23	
	Jane	2	4	
	George	2	4	
	Lydia	1	2	
Vlog Mentioned	Lizzie	21		45
	Charlotte	4		8
	Jane	4		8
	Lydia	4		8
	Darcy	3		6
	Gigi	3		6
	Ricky	1		2
	Bing	1		2
YouTube/Internet	Lizzie	2		50
Mentioned	Jane	1		25
	Ricky	1		25

Viewers Asked for Input		0	0	0
Viewers Input Mentioned	Lizzie	10	71	
	Charlotte	5	35	

Table 4. Context of Strategy Frequency

Strategies	# of Eps	Occurrences			
		Adaptation (A)	Background (B)	Plot (P)	Story Effect
Viewers Directly Addressed	17	3	3	6	Y: 5/N: 12
Vlog Mentioned	10	9	1	8	Y: 7/N: 6
YouTube/Internet Mentioned	4	2	0	1	Y: 0/N: 4
Viewers Asked for Input	0	0	0	0	0
Viewers Input Mentioned	5	5	1	1	Y: 2/N: 3

Appendix E