SPORTS TALK IN THE NEW MEDIA AGE: PRODUCERS, ONLINE FANS, AND

CHAMPIONSHIP GAMES, 2007

by

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(Under the Direction of Horace Newcomb)

ABSTRACT

Convergence, as broadly defined and applied as the term is, has ushered in countless ideas and debates concerning audiences, producers, their roles, and their relationships. Scholars, bloggers, and other authors in the "utopian" and "dystopian" camps have been debating about issues surrounding this relationship, with utopians largely focusing on its "emancipatory" manifestations and the blurring distinction between audiences and producers while dystopians have largely focused on convergence's exploitative, limiting manifestations and the disproportionate reliance of the "average" consumer on "large, corporate" entities. This project sets out to compare the treatment of football games on television networks and online message boards in order to gain insight into the dynamics of the relationship between the members of the online community and the producers of the programming. An adaptation of Bakhtin's dialogism suggests a middle ground between the two contrasting positions.

INDEX WORDS: convergence, utopian, dystopian, dialogism, televised sports, conventions, audience, participation, fanzines, message boards, online fandom, ESPN, CBS, FOX

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B.A., Southern Methodist University, 2006

A Thesis Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of The University of Georgia in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

MASTER OF ARTS

ATHENS, GEORGIA

2008

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August 2008

DEDICATION

This project is dedicated to my family; especially my younger sister who I'm sure will read it carefully, giving strict attention to every detail.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thank you, of course, to my family - mom, dad, and sister. Thank you to my advisor, Dr. Horace Newcomb, and my committee members, Drs. Carolina Acosta-Alzuru and Jay Hamilton. Thank you to Mrs. Debbie Sickles, whose kindness these past two years has made this process both enjoyable and fulfilling. Finally, thank you to my friends and colleagues who sent me advice, articles, and most importantly, support throughout this project.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

<u>What is Convergence?</u>

The dynamics of television have undergone dramatic transformations over the past decade. In particular, the relationships between producers and audiences have been greatly affected by new technologies and industry consolidation. The available platforms on which content is received have expanded beyond the television to portable mp3 players, laptops, and cell-phones. Additionally, many viewers now have the ability to choose exactly when they view a program thanks to digital-video recorders (DVRs). Coupled together, new modes and opportunities for reception and interaction have eroded limitations set by space and time, allowing audiences to customize their viewing experience using other technologies.

The Internet has also emerged to heighten interactivity between program and viewer via websites devoted to particular shows. These websites (both network affiliated and independently operated) allow fans to present potential season spoilers, discuss alternative storylines, hypothesize about the fate of their favorite program, and comment on anything else imaginable related to the show. All of these new technologies revolving around and working with television have issued in unprecedented levels of audience participation with the televised text at the same time the text has begun to move beyond the television to other platforms. In addition to platform expansion, conglomeration among major media firms has allowed corporations to enter into strategic alliances, acquire, and merge with other firms to expand their technological and marketing capabilities.

Television networks have begun to capitalize on new media to expand their programs' franchising opportunities. As audiences view and interact with the network's content on alternative platforms, networks expand their reach to these platforms, hoping to realize new

profit-potentials. The Internet is a prime example of this practice. In order to expand a program's franchise, a network might create a website with episodes for sale through iTunes, a store with memorabilia, and a message board where fans gather to discuss the show.

These changes are affecting the traditional production, distribution, and consumption logics that characterized much of the late 20th century. Though dealing with separate issues surrounding television, all of the topics discussed can be conceptualized in terms of convergence. Convergence is a difficult concept to grasp because it encompasses so many different aspects of the modern media landscape. Convergence describes both the phenomenon of multi-platform media use among audiences and television networks moving content online. It describes both mergers between major media firms and sports fans discussing games on message boards. Additionally, it describes both the new mobility of digital content and the measures that firms take to adapt and capitalize on this transformation. As Henry Jenkins writes, convergence is "A word that describes technological, industrial, cultural, and social changes in the ways media circulates within our culture" (2006: 282). This study focuses on convergence with respect to audience participation. In particular, it explores how television audiences are using new media to complement original broadcasts and the implications that action has for the audience/producer relationship.

A wide array of scholars, bloggers, and other authors has emerged in the last decade with varying positions on the cultural effects of convergence. The following section will parse these positions into two theoretical constructs – utopian and dystopian. Afterwards, a relatively brief historical account of fan participation with television will support the position that a more thorough description of convergence and its cultural implications begins with a re-conceptualization of the relationship between "audience" and "producer." A study will then

examine how audience participation with television programs on online message boards supports a characterization of the audience/producer relationship that differs from the one posed by both utopians and dystopians.

Utopian vs. Dystopian Perspectives

For this study the literature surrounding convergence and its societal, cultural, economic, and political implications was categorized into two broad theoretical constructs – utopian and dystopian. While reducing such a large body of literature into two camps certainly presents some problems (not the least of which is the risk of ignoring important nuances within the individual perspectives) it will serve in the end to conceptually situate my own analysis. Furthermore, the two constructs are far reaching, containing the necessary breadth to capture a large majority of convergence literature. The end of this section will provide an interpretation and synthesis of these camps with the goal of forming a distinctive position on convergence, participation, and the relationship that exists between audiences and producers of content.

Utopianism

Scholars, bloggers, and other authors operating under a utopian perspective often speak of convergence in terms of audience participation with mediated content and the creation of individual content. Believing a power disparity exists between producers and consumers, they see convergence as an opportunity for the "average" audience member to combat the dominant media corporations and to realize the potentials of an open public sphere and a democratized communications structure. By refiguring the traditional production, distribution, and consumption logics that marked the modern media landscape, utopian scholars believe individuals will achieve "greater influence over the decisions that [affect] the production and distribution of culture" (Green & Jenkins, 2008). There are at least two ways of doing this. One

is to participate within the current structure. This may entail webzines, blogs, or fantasy sports leagues concerning existing, corporate produced content. The other is to create independent content and disperse it through alternative distribution channels such as YouTube or MySpace[1]. The term "viral" describes this phenomenon of independent content becoming widely visible via alternate modes of distribution. In this view, no longer will the consumer exist in his or her past role as the "giant maw at the end of the mass media's long conveyor belt," (Shirky, 2000) but will instead reappropriate existing content or create his or her own and disperse it through different channels.

Pierre Lévy's (1997, 2001) notion of "collective intelligence" serves as the groundwork for many utopian scholars, Henry Jenkins in particular. The term describes the aggregation of individual knowledge by means of virtual communities which then affords the individual greater knowledge that he or she would not have been able to attain otherwise. In its most idealistic form, collective intelligence provides the individual the ability to harness the knowledge-power of a collective to even the power distribution between them and media conglomerates. Moreover, if used in more "serious" contexts (and Lévy believes it will be), collective intelligence can change the ways other political, economic, and educational institutions operate.

Henry Jenkins employs the concept of collective intelligence in his book *Convergence Culture* (2006) using the hit reality show *Survivor* (2000) and its online fan base as an example. *Survivor* has thrived as one of the most successful reality shows ever produced due in part to the incredible participation among its online fans. Message boards emerged in the beginning of the show's history with audience members attempting to spoil the season finales. To do this,

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[1] It comes to question whether or not YouTube and MySpace can still be referenced as "alternative" modes of distribution considering their recent acquisition by Google and News Corporation, respectively. Nonetheless, during their independent periods YouTube and MySpace certainly operated outside the notion of "traditional" distribution channels.

individual posters to the message boards relied on each other for singular pieces to the puzzle, eventually collecting an aggregate of information that was married together to form potential spoilers to the show before the finale aired. This, according to Jenkins, is a prime example of collective intelligence in action. By transporting the televised narratives to an online forum, the spoilers interfered with the ability of the producers to control audience knowledge. As a result, the audience became exponentially more instrumental in developing *Survivor's* narratives rather than CBS and the producers of the program having full control.

Jenkins is not, however, operating out of naïveté, blinded by the utopian possibilities of convergence. As he sees it, convergence contains utopian possibilities for the industry as well. While audiences have certainly attained new power thanks to multi-platform media consumption and online collective intelligence, the industry has also benefited. For one, convergence affords television networks the opportunity to re-purpose content onto a multitude of platforms. Podcasts, online streaming video, and pay-per-play downloads are a few of the ways the industry has harnessed the potentials of convergence to profit from content on a variety of platforms in addition to just the television. Thus convergence has afforded the industry greater power with respect to profit-potential.

Standing in contrast to Jenkins, Lévy, Shirky, and others in the utopian camp are those Jenkins refers to as "critical pessimists." While Jenkins refers to himself as a "critical utopian," taking into account obstacles that prevent us from entering into a democratized media landscape, other scholars in the field perceive convergence as severely limiting democratic communication. I characterize those Jenkins refers to as "critical pessimists" (2006: 247) as "dystopian." Such scholars and critics include, but certainly are not limited to, Andrew Keen, Robert McChesney, Dan Schiller, and Tiziana Terranova.

A Critique of Utopianism – The Dystopian Perspectives

At least three different critiques characterize the dystopian position. First is a critique of media conglomeration and consolidation. Second is a critique of the perceived exploitation of audience created content. Third is a critique of the consumer who, with the aid of converging technologies, poaches intellectual property without compensation, thus threatening the entire industry. The dystopian perspective contains a great deal of nuance and even parsing the literature into three sub categories does not exhaust this position.

Regarding the first critique, political economists such as Robert McChesney work with convergence at the "macro" level, voicing concern over media conglomeration and the relationships emerging between media, convergence, capitalism, and the individual (Hesmondhalgh, 2008). He and others in this camp advocate for media reform in hopes of ending "corporate domination of both the media system and the policy-making process…that causes serious problems for a functioning democracy and a healthy culture" (McChesney, 2004: 7). In his book, *Rich Media, Poor Democracy* (1999), McChesney cites statistics showing how a few companies are behind the large majority of content that is circulated in the United States.

McChesney's central thesis is that over the past 20 years the United States government, along with the FCC, has failed to appropriately regulate media mergers and acquisitions (McChesney & Schiller, 2002, www.freepress.net). As a result we have seen the alienation of women and minorities, decreased journalistic quality and integrity, and the silencing of independent voices in the "mainstream media."

As the founder of Free Press in 2002, a non-profit organization advocating U.S. media reform, McChesney sees convergence culture as, at least to some degree, a threat to the utopian ideals of a democratic communications system and an uninhibited public sphere. This is not to

say that McChesney devalues such manifestations of convergence as increasing audience participation, independent media, or citizen journalism. Instead his focus rests on media consolidation and conglomeration. According to his organization's website, www.freepress.net, Free Press aims to "promote diverse and independent media ownership, strong public media, and universal access to communications." With this in mind, it is not enough for audiences to interact with corporate generated content, nor is it enough for audiences to produce and distribute independent content. Rather, according to McChesney, in order to realize a purely democratic communications system whereby each individual is afforded some degree of power, the entire media system must be held accountable for engaging in unfair consolidation, unethical political tactics, and the resulting stifling of an independent, citizen based communications system.

Regarding the critique of the exploitation of audience created content, others contend that the convergence environment produces phenomena that at the surface seem emancipatory and participatory, but serve only to reinforce and advance industrial control by restricting content that does not adhere to industrial standards and expectations (Ytreberg, 2004). Furthermore, critics like Tiziana Terranova (2003) argue that fan labor found on the Web is often "shamelessly exploited" for the benefit of corporate interests. This particular dystopian perspective may accuse the utopians of drinking the convergence Kool-Aid without taking into account the limits placed on audience participation by media entities.

While CNN invites its viewers to submit i-Reports to their website (http://www.cnn.com/exchange/ireports/topics/forms/breaking.news.html), one is unlikely to see clips that challenge existing professional standards. Thus, the possibilities for challenging the status quo of the "most trusted name in news" become squandered because the guardians of the gate are those operating and benefiting from such a standard. Moreover, the individual providing

the materials allows CNN to profit from content they did not have to produce. This introduces an economic incentive for the network to capitalize on its audience. Not only will CNN profit from selling advertising according to the ratings provided by the audience, but from obtaining free content from them, as well.

The final dystopian position seems counter to the others because of its alignment with industrial interests. Media industry apologists like Andrew Keen see convergence as not only crippling the industry, but also threatening the ideals of capitalism. User-controlled websites like Wikipedia allow unfettered access for individuals to post "knowledge" that goes unverified and thus takes revenue away from more trusted and traditional sources. Emerging software threatens artists and the record industry by allowing fans to share and download music free of charge. These phenomena, according to Keen, dismantles our traditional capitalist structure where expertise, specialization, and the division of labor progresses society further than one where every person holds license to do anything. Keen writes, "Today, on a Web where everyone has an equal voice, the words of a wise man count for no more than the mutterings of a fool" (Keen, 2007: 30).

The Keen position is probably the one that stands in most direct contrast to the utopian position, which relishes the deconstruction of traditional media vanguardism, taking sides with the users and fans who threaten the current communication structure. Dystopians like Schiller and McChesney advocate for communication reform in hopes of greater empowerment and representation of everyday citizens. Keen, on the other hand, takes the side of the industry charging these "amateurs" with insurrection, characterizing them as dangerous to the ideals of our country. But whether it is McChesney talking about media conglomeration, Ytreberg and Terranova dealing with audience participation, or Keen railing against the destruction of

professionalism, all look skeptically at convergence and its potentials for democratizing communication.

Analysis and Critiques of Dystopianism

As Hesmondhalgh (2008) argues, those scholars and activists operating from a dystopian view of media consolidation ought to be praised for their "politically engaged scholarship." Research from this tradition extends beyond the walls of universities to Washington, D.C., where advocates such as McChesney, Edward Herman, and Noam Chomsky send calls to action in hopes of achieving a more equitable and democratic communications system. Furthermore, worries over media consolidation are not a unique feature of the dystopian position. As Jenkins (2006: 248) writes, "[media] concentration is bad because it stifles competition…lowers diversity…[and] lowers the incentives for companies to negotiate with their consumers." However, it is the dystopians who most often lead the charge on these issues. Nonetheless, for all the contributions the dystopian camp provides for the regulatory debates surrounding media, their positions leave room for at least four critiques.

The first is the apparent omission of content from a cultural analysis of convergence. As defined in the introduction, convergence is not simply the consolidation of large media entities. Its reach extends to describing the changing ways consumers experience and engage content. In this way the dystopian focus is narrow, not taking into account what other manifestations of convergence exist. Claiming that media convergence and consolidation is bad because they produce such disastrous political-economic phenomena tells only half the story since these terms deal with issues surrounding content, as well.

Some might say that this critique misses the point of Free Press, that their concerns are not with convergence from the consumer perspective, but reside at the macro, policy perspective.

McChesney's analyses and activism are predicated on a holistic view of the entire U.S. media system and such a critique surrounding an omission of content could be seen as superfluous. This rebuttal still does not combat the assertion that any analysis of a media system must take into account empirical analyses surrounding the resulting content derived from that particular media system. How are we supposed to fully grasp the dangers of media consolidation without giving ample treatment to content?

A second critique is that critical dystopians are, so to speak, barking up the wrong tree. The real problem is not that media corporations are merging and acquiring one another. This era of consolidation is a manifestation of a capitalist economy. A more germane critique of convergence would revolve around a critique of this system that encourages and promotes such activities. The industry is not consolidating so that they can further silence the voices of the oppressed, but are instead doing so out of an economic imperative to their shareholders. Echoing this critique, Hesmondhalgh writes, "ultimately any serious analysis of capitalist media would *at some point* have to confront relationships between, say, capitalism and modernity" (2008).

The third critique speaks to issues raised by Terranova, Ytreberg and others in the "free labor" camp. Latent in such a position is the dictum, "If they only knew..." Contributors to CNN's i-Report, YouTube, and others of the sort need to be emancipated from a system of exploitation. If they only knew how their talents were being used just so that mega-corporations could increase their profit shares, they would not participate in such an activity. If they only knew that only those i-Reports that mirror traditional professional standards had a chance of airing, they would not be so eager to contribute. Regardless of whether those individuals contributing to CNN, MSNBC, or any other outlet are engaged in a false-consciousness, those contributors may not care how their contributions contribute to the networks' labor-economy.

Therefore, such a position that these individuals must be emancipated from a system of "free-labor" could be seen as an imposition.

Furthermore, the free labor camp makes the assumption that audience produced content belongs at least on equal footing as network produced content. Despite whether or not this is the case, audiences who produce content may not necessarily wish to challenge the status quo, or they may indeed be troubled by network standards but wish to express their views nonetheless. In making assumptions on behalf of the audiences' motivations in producing content the free labor camp does not take into account the potential gratifications derived by the audience from participating and creating – even if it is on the networks' terms. It remains possible for both networks and audiences to derive mutually beneficial results from "free labor."

Instead, the focus of user-generated content need not to be exclusively placed on its exploiting and limiting potentials, but should also focus on how these practices aid in furthering the "critique of professionalization" (Hamilton, 2008: 221). Critics of "free labor" ignore the impact it has for developing our ideas about what it means to be a journalist, filmmaker, or musician. While audience-produced content certainly has some exploitative and limiting potential, it also has potential for aiding in media democratization as participation within fields like journalism by everyday citizens broadens our notions of what it means to perform these tasks.

The fourth critique is again voiced by David Hesmondhalgh. Those critics who focus their efforts on media conglomeration often "understate the importance of small companies" (Hesmondhalgh, 2002: 150). It is undeniable that there has been a rapid consolidation in the media industry over the past 30 years resulting in few companies distributing a majority of content; however, Hesmondhalgh cites the increasing influence of smaller media companies

since 1980. These firms still employ a large number of people and possess the ability to produce widespread content. The music industry, for one, has long prided itself on "institutional autonomy," thus allowing greater control by artists and independent record labels (Toynbee, 2000). Independent labels and their artists, while perhaps not having commensurate distribution capabilities as corporate labels, still possess a considerable amount of cultural influence. There is, as Hesmondhalgh puts it, "a great deal of resentment towards the industry and 'selling out'" (2002: 151). McChesney and similar critics understate the influence of these types of organizations and their potential to combat what they see as a domineering system of conglomeration.

The past decade has witnessed a growth in independent distribution by musicians, in particular. YouTube, MySpace, and other websites under the "social-networking" genre have allowed independent artists the opportunity to distribute their work in mass quantity and, as a result, become rather successful. As a recent example, the acclaimed band Radiohead announced in 2007 that they would be offering their new album, In Rainbows, on their website for as little or as much the user wished to pay. This move garnered much international attention, as it was one of the first where a major band distributed an album without the aid of a major record label (Monaghan, 2007). While this is an isolated example, it speaks to a larger trend of independent and well-known artists alike using new technologies. The result is the production and distribution of large quantities of cultural capital without the aid of large media conglomerates.

Towards a Dialogic Perspective

An important theme at the heart of the convergence debate is the power-relationship between producers and audiences. Debates between utopians and dystopians frequently center on different perspectives of the dynamics of this relationship. Many utopians argue that

convergence affords audiences new levels of participation, thus shrinking the power differential between them and producers. Dystopians often tend to question the potential of convergence to shrink the differential and, in fact, argue that convergence will expand the gap between audience and producer. However, this debate surrounding the power-relationship between producers and audiences has, for the most part, been predicated on either contentious or reductive characterizations of these two groups. Both utopians and dystopians tend to characterize the audience/producer relationship as overly contentious. Dystopians also tend to rely on reductive definitions of the two parties where audience and producer exist as two separate, embattled entities. Furthermore, the dystopian tendency is to lump all content together, thus ignoring how audiences mandate the success or failure of most media products. Reductive definitions and contentious descriptions of producers and audiences place unnecessary limits on the discourse surrounding these issues by polarizing the two groups and ignoring how much each side relies on the other.

While utopians typically do claim that the producer/audience distinction is becoming vague, they still tend to characterize the two parties as existing in contention with each other. In doing so, they tend to posit too much power to audiences by overly lauding such participatory actions as discussing television programs on a message board. They fail to concede that although audiences are interacting with and producing content, they often rely on producers to provide the platform to do so. Furthermore, some utopians tend to ignore how television networks and producers often rely on audience participation to further their own economic imperatives.

On the other hand, in relying on reductive definitions of audiences and by operating with a holistic view of content, dystopians tend to posit too much power to the producers, thus

ignoring how much producers rely on audiences to consume their product and even sometimes to generate content. The lack of specific attention to content ignores how audiences possess the power to mandate which television programs, records, films, and other media products succeed or fail. Additionally, the lumping of all content and the rigid distinction between audiences and producers by dystopians ignores how audiences, through participatory actions such as posting on online message boards, become instrumental in the interpretation and presentation of certain media products. The dystopian response to this critique would probably be to say that audiences still have only a limited selection of media products from which to choose and thus their tastes are merely reflection of large, corporate interests. Nonetheless, by employing reductive descriptions and by not giving attention to specific media content, dystopians ignore the power audiences have to both manipulate content and, by their pocketbooks, to set the limits on what media products succeed or fail.

Rethinking such reductive and contentious characterizations of audiences and producers can allow us to further investigate the complex relationships that exist between them. Audiences are not strictly consumers and producers do not just provide content, but both rely on each other and neither adheres to a single role. In fact, as Axel Bruns (2007) has recently posited, some outlets such as Wikipedia and Second Life make no distinctions whatsoever between users and producers. His work surrounding the term "produsage" has caused several discussions on what it means to perform these roles in this new media environment.

The vulnerability in applying such descriptions of these two entities is further evidenced in the various ways audiences have previously interacted with and produced content. The line that separates television producer from audience has never been impenetrable. In fact, television

audiences have been bouncing back and forth between the two sides for decades while both producers and audiences have relied on each other.

Challenging the Reductive Descriptions of Audiences: The Fanzine

In 1968, Jean Lorrah and Willard Hunt published a widely circulated episode of *Star Trek* entitled "Visit to a Weird Planet" (Lorrah & Hunt, 1968). In this episode the fictional Kirk, Spock, and McCoy found themselves trapped on the actual *Star Trek* production set while the actors Shatner, Nimoy, and Kelley found themselves on the fictional *Starship Enterprise*. As time progressed and as Kirk, Spock, and McCoy succeeded in maintaining their cover in the "real world," Scotty was able to avert a crisis from the "other side" and return all six men to their rightful spatio-temporal locations.

"Visit to a Weird Planet" is only one of thousands of television scripts authored under communities known as amateur press associations (APAs) during the late 1960s and 1970s. It was during this time that a new form of textual interaction between audience and television was manifested in a tangible form known as the fanzine.

While fanzines dealing with television programs were introduced as a new, viable form of interaction during the 1960s and 1970s, the history of the fanzine extends well beyond that (The Fanac Fan History Project, n.d.). One of the oldest APAs in the United States, the National Amateur Press Association (NAPA), conducted their first meeting in 1876 (Koelewyn, 2005). Since then there have been countless fanzines independently produced and distributed in the United States and across the world. Although advancements in technology since the early 20th century have altered the production of fanzines, the method of distribution has remained largely the same. Contributors often submit their materials to the APA by mailing to an "official editor" or "central mailer." The OE is then responsible for arranging and distributing the publications to

the members of that particular association (The University of Iowa Libraries, n.d.). Membership

dues come in a variety of forms. Some associations require small fees while others prefer their

members to regularly submit material or "letters of comment" (Southern Fandom Confederation,

n.d.).

With the success of television programs such as *Star Trek, Starsky and Hutch*, and *The*

Dukes of Hazzard, fanzines began to grow in popularity during the 1960s and 1970s. Advances

in publishing technology, coupled with an audience desire to interact with and take part in

televised narratives, gave way to a new type of fan writing. Rather than producing original

pieces, fans of particular genres began elaborating and even inventing narratives for existing

television programs (Jenkins, 1992). Fanzines centering on existing television programs were

the tangible product of an audience that assumed ownership and rights to narratives rather than

passively accepting those that were originally proposed. As audiences began widely producing

material that complimented existing television programs the line that separated the producers and

audiences began to show its vulnerability.

Perhaps the most radical transformation for both APAs and their fanzines has come in the

last decade with the advent and evolution of the Internet. There certainly had been substantive

changes with respect to the production, content, and distribution of fanzines throughout the early

20th century through to the early 1990s. However, the platform on which the content was

delivered had remained constant. The Internet introduced a shift in platform and greatly

expanded fanzine authorship and readership opportunities.

To elaborate by example, the fan site *The Thunder Child* (www.thethunderchild.com),

collaborates various genres (books, television, film, music, collectibles) into one website where

contributions from everyday web browsers can be submitted, reviewed, and published online.

These webzines have emerged to open the virtual floodgates allowing for nearly anyone with an Internet connection and a desire to either create or expand on existing narratives to participate in this communal discourse.

The lines that have separated producers and audiences of television content have long been eroding and the questions surrounding this age of participation hinge not on whether fans are acting as producers (they have been for decades now), but rather what implications their participation with televised content have for our notions of the relationship between audiences and producers. Constructing reductive definitions of these two parties does not seem ideal. In fact, as Henry Jenkins and fanzines have demonstrated, the line between television producers and audiences has never been impenetrable.

Challenging the Contentious Description of the Audience/Producer Relationship: The Message Board and Co-Reliance

The relationship between audience and producer is not always contentious. Message boards are online communities where people gather to post comments on a wide array of subjects, including television programs (Baym, 2000). These online communities are also used by television networks to promote certain programs, to re-purpose and re-distribute content, and to encourage deeper engagement by audiences with the network's programs. As a result, a co-reliance emerges as the audience relies on the television network to provide the platform on which they discuss and elaborate certain programs while the network relies on the participatory audience to continue to use the message board and drive traffic to the website.

It is important to state that I am referring to television-network operated message boards and not independent, fan-controlled message boards. While there are some differences between the two, the basic schematics and functioning are largely the same. First, a message board

usually contains several forums assigned particular topics. To take NBC's message boards for example, there are forums for every program that appears on the network from "30 Rock" to "Saturday Night Live" (National Broadcasting Company, 2008). Within these individual forums are topics that are sometimes called "threads." Threads can be thought of as titles that guide the conversation; however, people who post messages to the thread (referred to as "posters") are free to guide the discussion in whatever direction they please so long as it does not violate the website's "terms and conditions."

Second, many message boards allow their members (or posters) anonymity. As a result the identity politics that come into play in online message boards differ from those in the "real world." Rhiannon Bury (2005: 210-11) discusses how online fan communities allow women, in particular, opportunity to mask or perform whatever identity they choose. Because identity is constructed and presented online without any physical element to which the identity can be traced, what the poster writes becomes central in how he or she is received by the community (Donath, 1999).

Third, message boards are typically regulated both by moderators (sometimes referred to as "mods") and by their members. "Flaming" is a term that describes the act of posting hostile or insulting comments regarding another member. This is sometimes punishable by permanent banishment from the message board by the moderator. A "troll" is a poster believed by the message board community to be an unwelcome intruder. Trolls are most commonly found on sports message boards as fans of rival teams post inflammatory comments about the team on which the message board is centered. Members of a message board will typically resist the troll by ignoring the comments or reporting the activity to the moderator.

Fans posting to television network operated message boards engage in a variety of activities that blur the distinction between them and the television producers. Much like the fanzines discussed above, character development, narrative expansion, and the presentation of potential season spoilers are just a few activities that occur on these boards by the posters (Jenkins, 2006). Additionally, posters are typically not hesitant to criticize the network or its producers for certain creative decisions. However, while the online audience oftentimes assumes co-ownership of the televised content, they still rely on the television network and the producers to provide the platform on which the posters gather to assume such a role. Furthermore, there is an economic incentive by the network and its producers to have the audience gather on their website to discuss certain programs.

Message boards exist as part of a wider effort by the networks to establish a web presence. As such, the boards provide the network with a place to promote their programs. Much of the promotion occurs thanks to the online audience that posts comments regarding their favorite (and sometime least favorite) programs. Aside from providing a platform where audiences can become more engaged with the content, because they exist on the network's website, network operated message boards allow the network to post links to online stores where fans can purchase merchandise such as T-shirts and DVDs. Perhaps most importantly; however, the boards provide a place where network audiences can become more engaged and more faithful to the program and the respective television network. Therefore, while the audience relies on the network to provide the platform on which they assume creative co-ownership of content, the television network relies on the participatory audience to elevate traffic to the website, and thus, to allow the network to realize new profit potentials. The result is a co-reliance between

audiences and network producers that looks different than the contentious structure posited by utopians.

Dialogism as a Starting Point to Understanding the Audience/Producer Relationship

The term "dialogic" or "dialogism" is often associated with the Soviet theorist Mikhail Bakhtin. According to him, words (or utterances) exist within particular conceptual systems and when a listener hears, he or she then assimilates the message into his or her own conceptual system. By this process, a speaker "strives to get a reading on his own word, and on his own conceptual system that determines this word, within the alien conception of the understanding receiver; he enters into dialogical relationships with certain aspects of this system" (Bakhtin, 1981:282, Trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist). The transmission of a message then does not exist solely on the terms of the sender, nor does that message contain rigid meaning. Rather, the sender enters into a negotiation of meaning with the receiver while the receiver interprets the message under his or her own conceptual system.

The "dialogue" that develops is not limited to the "author" and the "reader." Rather, as Newcomb (1984) elaborates, for television, camera angles, costuming, and other sometime latent facets of a program serve to create dialogue. "Character zones," according to Bakhtin contain all the elements of a character – from costuming to language – and these zones interact with other character zones and ranges to create meaning. The television, then, affords the opportunity for us to see these relations and, thus, create meaning before any dialogue between characters ensues.

While it is widely ascribed as a literary theory, Michael Holquist (1990) also notes that dialogism has much in common with relativity. Just as motion is undetectable unless one object changes its position in relation to another, meaning is relative because it comes about from the

relation between at least two bodies. The relation between two or more bodies is not limited to interpersonal relations, but may also include institutional bodies, as well. For this project, the two includes posters on message boards and the television networks.

My Adaptation of Bakhtin's Dialogism

This study will employ an adaptation of Bakhtin's theory of dialogism in order to situate it within the context of convergence and the audience/producer relationship. "Adaptation" is not the ideal term to use because of the great differences between the types of interactions of which Bakhtin was writing and the types of interactions afforded by new media technologies. Bakhtin was primarily writing about "texts," or written works, where the material was received from an author and then negotiated by a reader. In this study, the "text" will not come directly from the "author." Rather, the television networks report, interpret, and present an external text according to particular conventions while an online audience reacts to the same external text in addition to responding to the televised presentation. Bakhtin, in his time, could not have forecasted this type of interaction due to the technological limitations.

Nonetheless, this dialogic perspective of the audience/producer relationship builds on the utopian account of audiences by first acknowledging that the lines separating audiences and producers have long been eroding. However, it rejects polarizing these two entities and instead recognizes how much each side relies on the other. Audiences necessarily rely on producers to provide the platform on which they interpret and manipulate content. Conversely, producers are now more than ever relying on vibrant, participatory audiences to generate higher ratings and interest in their programs. As such, the relationship between these two entities no longer appears to be as polarizing as might be characterized by the utopians and dystopians. Rather, the dialogic approach suggests that both sides exist in a give and take – a collaborative process whereby

producers and audiences join to collectively shape meanings behind a given program's themes and narratives. Power, then, is not exclusively concentrated on either end of the spectrum, but rather is in constant flux.

An anti-reductive, dialogic conception of the audiences/producer relationship recognizes that the relationship between these two parties is more complex than the dichotomous and contentious structure posed by utopians and dystopians. While producers certainly possess power in their position as originators and presenters of content, audiences possess significant power through their participatory activities. Through the manipulation, interpretation, and discussion of televised content, audiences are assuming creative co-ownership. At the same time, producers are capitalizing on these audiences by inviting them to assume co-ownership on network-controlled websites where the networks hope that message boards will serve to produce a more engaged, loyal fan base.

The aim of this study is determine how a theoretical tool such as dialogism can be used as a starting point for understanding the relationship between audience and producer in this convergence culture. To demonstrate the utility of a dialogic perspective it will be helpful to present a specific case in which the relationship between the television producers and the audience appears to be dialogic. Thus, the research question that this study seeks to address is, "what does the audience participation with televised content on Internet message boards reveal about the audience/producer relationship in this converging environment?" My analysis will examine two specific programs and the online activity by the online audience surrounding these programs to discuss how this dialogic perspective functions in one particular setting.

Chapter 2: Methods

<u>Object of Study</u>

The aim of this study is to analyze programming that has a vibrant, participatory fan base that will allow me to investigate the dynamics of the relationship between the producers, the audience, and the content they create. To this end, two programs were chosen; the 2007 American Football Conference (AFC) championship game between the San Diego Chargers and the New England Patriots broadcast on CBS and the 2007 National Football Conference (NFC) championship game between the New York Giants and the Green Bay Packers broadcast on FOX. These games and their televised versions demonstrate televised football's mass appeal. I chose televised football not only for its appeal, but also impact on our society, and perhaps most importantly, its incredibly passionate fan base. According to a 2007 Nielsen report, 13 of the top 25 top rated broadcast network telecasts of all time were sports with 12 of those 13 being American football telecasts. Moreover, in the 2005-2006 broadcast season (September 2005 through June 2006), 16 of the top 25 highest rated sporting events were American football telecasts (Nielsen Media Research, 2007). These figures demonstrate the cultural significance of these games and make the audience's relationships with these games a topic that can produce insights concerning the audience interaction with various elements of the televised presentation.

This project does not attempt to make generalizable claims about television audiences. Rather, the audience to be examined is relatively small. This is a particular segment of a television football audience that chooses to discuss and elaborate on themes using online message boards. Therefore any analysis that follows ought to be applied only to this particular audience segment and not to television audiences as a whole. However, ideas resulting from this

project concerning online audience behavior and their implications might be valuable in other projects examining other television audience segments.

In addition to a close examination and analysis of the televised broadcasts, I will examine two of the larger online message board communities dealing with football – ESPN.com (http://boards.espn.go.com/boards/mb/mb?sport=espn&id=index#nfl) and CBS's Sportsline.com (http://www.sportsline.com/mcc/messages/board-list/NFL). Examining these sites allows me to investigate how the audience interprets, manipulates, and creates content surrounding the broadcast. Although it is ideal to look at the message boards of CBS and FOX rather than CBS and ESPN, FOX's online message boards (http://community.foxsports.com/boards/) are relatively vacant compared to those of ESPN. Thus, in order to collect the amount of materials I believe will be required for thorough analyses, I will replace FOX with ESPN.[2]

It is difficult to pinpoint exactly why FOX does not have an active message board presence especially given that FOX broadcasts several National Football League games every season. One simple, yet possible, reason is that FOX Sports does not have the same level of web presence as ESPN and CBS. ESPN maintains a stronghold in the world of televised sports fandom. As a result, it is expected that their message boards would be more active than FOX, which does not often promote their online features.

The online communities that comprise the message boards on CBS and ESPN's websites are extremely large and active. Since its creation, ESPN's General NFL message board has received over 211,000 topics with over 2 million individual messages. CBS's General NFL message board receives several new messages every minute of the day and night. These are only

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[2] An interesting question outside the aim of this project is why the relative level of participation on different message boards devoted to the same topic.

the General message boards and these figures do not include the number of topics and messages under each individual team message boards.

<u>Selection Criteria</u>

Due to the overwhelming number of messages on the message boards, I placed four limitations when selecting the sample narratives. The first was to look only at the individual team message boards. This is because I began archiving threads in March; two months after the games were played. CBS only makes available the 500 most recent threads posted on any of their message boards. Since the number of threads and messages on the General board increases so dramatically over time, the threads created on and around January 20, 2008, were unavailable. Furthermore, and aside from convenience, I believed looking at the individual team message boards would afford me the opportunity to examine the more active and passionate audience members. Posters on the General message boards tend to discuss the National Football League as a whole and do not focus on individual teams. The individual team message boards are where audiences gather to discuss particular games because they are seen as virtual fan communities. Therefore eight total message boards will be presented -- the CBS Sportsline.com and ESPN.com San Diego Chargers, New England Patriots, New York Giants, and Green Bay Packers message boards.

Because this study requires the examination of how audiences are interacting with and contributing to the narratives and surrounding the games I also limited my sample to only those threads and messages dealing with the games. While these message boards are given a specific team title, fans posting on these boards are free and prone to discuss anything from politics, to cars, to each other. Limiting my sample to only those dealing with the actual games allowed me to select only relevant material.

The final two limitations were to select only those threads created within six days of the televised broadcast and to those threads having at least two responses. In preliminary runs I found that discussions of upcoming games typically began four to five days before the game since all four teams played games the week before. Furthermore, because this part of this study is about how themes and meaning are constructed, I am interested not so much in individual postings to the message board, but to the discourse that ensues between the posters and how they work with and create their own meanings as a collective. With these limitations in place, the resulting archived thread count from these eight message boards is still over 200.

<u>My Approach</u>

To engage in a close analysis of the games, I recorded them using a DVR and divided the two broadcasts into minute blocks separated by commercial breaks. I recorded the themes I saw and heard from the play-by-play announcer, color commentator, sideline reporters, and half-time analysts during each minute block. I then compiled the list of themes into a spreadsheet where I parsed through the data searching for patterns, both of commonalities and discrepancies.

For the message boards, I began searching through the archives on each website to locate all the threads posted from January 14 to January 26, 2008. Each individual team message board on each website (eight total) was given its own spreadsheet where I recorded the prominent themes presented and developed by the fans. I then saved the threads onto my hard drive to ensure that I would be able to access the data regardless of whether CBS or ESPN deleted the threads from their websites to make room for newer threads. Like the method applied to the televised broadcast I parsed through the data looking for patterns amongst the themes.

After collecting the themes from both the televised broadcast and the message boards I began looking for patterns between the most prominent themes discussed in each medium. My

goal was to find how fans on the message board were treating the narratives propagated on the televised broadcast, how the fans were creating their own narratives, and to see how the fans were writing about the broadcast, itself.[3] The purpose of the analysis was to determine if the relationship between audiences and producers could be better understood in the current age of convergence and online fan participation with television programs.

<u>Textual Analysis</u>

John Fiske (1987/1989: 14) argues that a television program differs from the text of the program. The program itself is a product of the television network and its producers. The program becomes a text when it is read, viewed, or heard by an audience that ascribes particular interpretations and meanings to the program. This study treats programs and their texts in the same way. The text and subsequent meanings of the program do not exist separately from the audience. Rather, the text and its meanings are a product of the individuals that view and interpret the televised product within the context of their respective conceptual frameworks.

This study uses textual analysis, informed by Stuart Hall (1975), as a method to gain insight into the relationship between audience and producer in the age of convergence. Hall recommends three stages: a preliminary "soak" of the material, a close reading and analysis of the themes and strategies in the text, and finally, an interpretation of the results that informs the study at large. Textual analysis has been employed by scholars in a variety of fields from sociology, literary studies, psychology, to media studies.

This type of textual analysis implies certain epistemological assumptions. Primarily, it points to a post-positivist framework in which truths and meanings are construed socially. Given these assumptions, the researcher need not rely on quantitative generalizability, validity, or

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[3] The online platform provides certain allowances and limitations regarding how audiences interact with the broadcast and each other. The differences in writing instead of speaking and the resulting implications may be an interesting extension of this project.

reliability. Claims of generalizability are typically limited to research within a quantitative, positivist framework. In this type of analysis, validity and reliability are manifest by the thoroughness, richness, and strength of the data that informs and supports the researcher's analyses and subsequent conclusions.

This study follows the three methodological stages posited by Hall. For the televised broadcast, both the AFC and NFC championship games were recorded and viewed in their entirety twice. Second, I revisited the programs several times, dividing them into segments where I extrapolated themes, conventions, and meanings that were presented throughout the broadcast. Finally, my analyses and conclusions are an interpretation of these findings that support the larger argument this project attempts to make – that the relationship between the television producers and the online message board audience can be characterized dialogically.

For the message boards, I read through the posts on both the CBS and ESPN websites before, during, and after the game was broadcast. Second, I saved the relevant threads, according to my selection criteria, in order to ensure that I would always have access. Following this, I organized the threads by theme. Finally, my analyses and conclusion draw upon the message board material to support the larger argument that this project attempts to make.

Chapter 3: AFC Championship Game

The first game to be presented in this section is the AFC (American Football Conference) Championship Game between the San Diego Chargers and the New England Patriots broadcast on CBS. The game began at 3:00pm eastern time on January 20, 2008, and took place at Gillette Stadium in Foxboro, Massachusetts. Calling the game were commentators Jim Nantz and Phil Simms. Nantz, a well-seasoned play-by-play commentator, has called football, basketball, golf, tennis, and Olympic games for CBS since 1985. Phil Simms gained his credibility as an NFL quarterback with the New York Giants. He won the MVP (most valuable player) award in Super Bowl XXI and after his football career, took up broadcasting. Simms has been a color-commentator with CBS since 1998. Steve Tasker performed a role as the sideline/field reporter. Although not heard from much during the broadcast, Nantz and Simms periodically called upon him to give updates about players and playing conditions. The following chapters will not make distinctions between individual commentators or sideline/field reporters. The purpose of the analysis is not to draw comparisons within the televised broadcast, but to draw comparisons between how the broadcast, as a whole, framed particular themes with how the online message board audience, as a whole, framed themes.

San Diego came into the game on an eight-game winning streak. Star quarterback Phillip Rivers had recently come into some controversy as he had been caught on camera engaging in verbal altercations with opposing teams. His reputation as a "trash talker" had been discussed quite frequently on a variety of television and radio programs throughout the season. Rivers, like several of his teammates, was hampered by injury. The quarterback had been struggling with an injured MCL (medial collateral ligament) and ACL (anterior crucial ligament) in his knee. LaDanian Tomlinson, San Diego's number one running back, won the NFL's MVP award the

previous season. However, Tomlinson's productivity had been limited due to some injuries he sustained during the season.

The New England Patriots were the clear favorites to win not only this game, but also the Super Bowl. At a perfect record of 17 and zero, the team was poised to make NFL history as the only undefeated team in the modern, 16 game regular season era. Star quarterback Tom Brady, along with his wide receivers Randy Moss and Wes Welker, had gained notoriety as the most dominant offensive unit in the NFL.

San Diego only led the game once, at the end of the first quarter. Despite kicker Nate Keading's four field goals, New England continued to answer with touchdowns. The final score of the game was 21 to 12, New England.

Like most broadcasts of sporting events, the commentators followed several conventions. These included descriptions of the weather, starting players, discussions of relevant injuries, analyses of offensive and defensive match-ups, descriptions of in-game strategies, in-depth halftime analyses, post-game analyses, along with other topics. Additionally, the commentators regularly engaged in friendly banter and sometimes discussed topics that were not directly related to the game. The specific treatment of these conventions by CBS, its producers, and commentators allowed for several themes to emerge.

Major Themes

The first twelve minutes of the CBS broadcast were filled primarily with commentators setting the stage. During this segment, Nantz, Simms, and Tasker delivered several conventional talking points relating to individual player characterizations, match-ups, in-game strategies, weather, and player injuries. These conventions operated thematically as they were expanded and developed with various narratives that could be traced back to the larger theme.

Individual Player Characterizations

CBS Broadcast: Phillip Rivers as the Perseverant Hero

Perhaps predictably, the individual player characterizations revolved almost exclusively around the star athletes. San Diego quarterback Phillip Rivers received a large amount of attention at the beginning of the broadcast. The first mention of Rivers dealt with a knee injury that had plagued the quarterback. The injury would be mentioned throughout the broadcast when describing Rivers' "character" and his performance.

During the first quarter of the game commentators remarked on Rivers' "confidence," stating, "he has never missed a game due to injury." As the game progressed and as Rivers continued to perform despite his knee announcers also made several statements regarding his "toughness." To close the first hour, CBS ran a testimonial by San Diego head coach Norv Turner that focused exclusively on Rivers' confidence and toughness. Meanwhile towards the end of the first half of the game Rivers made his first error – he threw an interception. Rather than criticizing the errant pass, one commentator quickly stated, "it was probably due to his injury." To close the first half commentators added how surprised they were at how well Rivers was able to move despite his injury.

Taken together the first half of the broadcast painted a heroic portrait of the San Diego quarterback. Toughness, confidence, and perseverance were all qualities the announcers were eager to bestow upon Rivers. These were the types of qualities that converged, constituting the player's "character." The halftime report; however, consisted of a debate that would ultimately influence how the rest of the broadcast presented the quarterback. Former Pittsburgh Steelers head coach turned broadcaster Bill Cowher suggested that "Rivers may be a hindrance" and that it was time to "start thinking about [backup quarterback] Billy Volek." Another commentator

opposed Cowher saying that benching Rivers was the wrong decision – that he was "laying his heart out for the team." This debate would be echoed in further detail in both the CBS and ESPN message boards.

Rivers received relatively little attention to start the second half. Breaking the silence at the two-hour mark was one commentator who defended Rivers from Cowher's remarks stating, "Rivers shouldn't be benched – he's the heart and soul of the team." Later in the post-game show, commentators readdressed the debate concerning whether or not the Chargers should have replaced Rivers with one saying, "he played on a bad knee, MCL, ACL – he's your leader and put himself on the line. Congrats to him for putting forth the effort." Overall despite the suggestion by Cowher that substituting Rivers would be the wisest choice, the overwhelming sentiment propagated by CBS and its commentators was that Rivers was a hero – a selfless leader who, despite a losing effort, put forth tremendous effort and suffered wrenching pain for the sake of his teammates and his fans. The fans online; however, would not be able to laud his efforts without significant opposition.

CBS and ESPN Message Boards: Struggling to Construct the Rivers Character

Most of the discussions on the message boards centered either on debates concerning Rivers' bravery in playing through an injury or debates concerning his perceived cocky attitude. These themes were discussed both in the broadcast and during the halftime report, but it was the posters who developed them, and as a result, painted a different picture of the athlete.

In a thread titled "Guts & passion" on the CBS San Diego board, the author stated, "Like Rivers or not, he lacks neither of those. I am the first to say he has some non playing qualities I think he should outgrow, and as an NFL fan hope he does. On the field he was tough yesterday and duked it out. Word is he has a partially torn ligament in his knee. A freakin QB playing with

that? Seriously?" (Mashers42, 2008). Later in the thread, a poster responded saying, "The fact he [Rivers] would be willing to go after having surgery on Monday and risk a totally blown knee is some good insight into his character" (Alex_SDCA, 2008). These posts painted the Rivers character as heroic and brave, but some were not so generous.

In a similarly titled thread on the CBS San Diego board, "GUTS AND HEART," posters questioned whether or not Rivers was selfish and foolish in his insistence to stay in the game. One poster wrote, "I think he [Rivers] was perhaps somewhat selfish. Was [San Diego Coach] Norv Turner derelict in letting a hobbled player stay in the game? Watching him hobble around during the game was tough to watch" (boltnut47, 2008). In the same thread, a debate emerged between rival fans regarding whether Rivers should have been benched in favor of backup quarterback Billy Volek. An exchange between two posters read, "dude charger fans are soooooo stupid! Billy Volek replace Philip Rivers? LMFAO!!! you should be punched for saying that!!!!!!!!!!!!!! thats is how dumb the charger fans have become" (super_boltz, 2008). To that one poster sarcastically replied, "Maybe you're right super boltz Rivers was just too good with his inspiring 0 td [touchdown] 2 int [interception] performance. I'm sure a health volek who proved himself in the indy game couldn't have done better than that…health volek > gimpy Rivers" (Korben343, 2008). ESPN's San Diego board contained similar thread topics. One titled "rivers needs to be out" contained several posts where fans argued whether or not the player should be benched. While the broadcast was perhaps responsible for providing injury information regarding Rivers and, to some extent, offering bits of analyses, the posters expanded on this information and, as a result, became instrumental among themselves in narrative and character development.

The CBS New England board was, perhaps predictably, more critical regarding Rivers' character. Debates in these threads most often centered on the athlete's perceived cocky attitude. In a thread pre-dating the game titled, "knock phillip rivers on his a**," posters painted a cruder picture of the quarterback writing, "this guy i s apnk i hope u guys kill him this weekend," and "he's a snot nose punk and so are his trash talking teammates go PATS" (broncoman, 2008, bostonbro12, 2008). However, much like threads regarding Rivers' "toughness," few assertions regarding his cockiness were left unchallenged. Another CBS New England thread titled, "Rivers talking 'TRASH' ----------- NOT" contained several heated exchanges between posters about whether or not Rivers ought to be characterized as a "trash-talker."

The message boards left no resolution regarding Rivers and his attitude, but instead elaborated on what was said in the broadcast or, as in the case of those posts created before the game; invented new threads of debate surrounding his character. In doing so, the posters, at least to some degree, became responsible for creating the "Rivers" character. It was not just the producers and commentators on the broadcast who were responsible for guiding the narratives, but the online fan audiences produced their own narratives that were negotiated and manipulated amongst themselves. Furthermore, unlike the broadcast where commentators were charged with behaving neutrally towards the game, the online audience was free to express allegiance to one team or player over the other. This point became particularly relevant during discussions of individual players because unlike the broadcast, the online audience was free to paint as crude (or as rosy) of a picture as they felt appropriate.

CBS Broadcast: LaDanian Tomlinson as the Object of Sympathy and Compassion

In the beginning of the broadcast special attention was given to San Diego's star running back, LaDanian Tomlinson. Commentators remarked how "emotional" Tomlinson was before

the game, mentioning how his eyes began to tear. Unfortunately for the athlete, he became

sidelined with a knee injury less than 15 minutes into the broadcast.

CBS continued to update the audience on the status of Tomlinson and his injury by

providing brief camera shots of the player on the sideline. Beginning on the 54th minute of the

broadcast CBS began their focus. Commentators stated that the choice to bench the star was a

"coach's decision" and that Tomlinson had stated earlier that he has "never really been hurt."

Sympathizing with Tomlinson, one commentator sarcastically remarked, "…it's *just* a sprained

MCL." This was the most attention he received from the commentators until the last 15 minutes

of the game.

As the game ended the commentators began taking a more sympathetic tone towards

Tomlinson. One mentioned how he was ready to play at the beginning of the game, but that it is

hard to tell unless "guys are leaning on you." Adding to this, one announcer mentioned how

Tomlinson "dreamed about this moment as a child" and how "disheartening" it must be for him

to sit on the sideline. Furthermore, there was a reference made to an altercation between the

New England Patriots and LaDanian Tomlinson during the previous season. Commentators

alluded to how the running back would not be able to follow through with the rivalry.

Throughout the broadcast CBS remained relatively sympathetic when characterizing

Tomlinson. There were several camera shots of him sitting on the bench and some mention of

how tough it must have been for him to watch his team play without him, but few if any

comments characterizing the player as anything other than a victim of an unfortunate

circumstance. The audience-controlled CBS and ESPN message boards; however, painted a

drastically different picture of Tomlinson that stands counter to the sympathetic tone in the CBS

broadcast.

CBS and ESPN Message Boards: LaDanian Tomlinson - The Coward

Like Phillip Rivers, Tomlinson played with an injury; however, unlike Rivers, Tomlinson was benched after the first quarter. This served as fodder for the posters who even before the game created gendered threads on the CBS San Diego message board such as, "Will Lady Tominson play?" writing, "Was just wondering if that skirt wearing ,whining ,complaining wussy will take the field tomorrow or will he wuss out like last week while his team was playing their hearts out" (Sithmaster, 2008)[4]. Once Tomlinson was benched during the game due to his injury, the cries characterizing him as a quitter grew much louder.

ESPN San Diego message board threads titled, "Who'd want LT in their foxhole?," "LT is a scared little girl," and "Phil Rivers shows more heart than LT" allowed posters to criticize and defend the player while simultaneously revealed how gender was used to negatively characterize certain players and decisions. Similarly, on the ESPN New England board, a thread titled "Will LT cry after the game?" characterized the athlete as weak. In a CBS San Diego thread titled, "Is LT a wuss?" the author set the debate stating, "He quit on his team after the 1st quarter while Rivers and Gates played through their more serious injuries" (HurricaneDij39, 2008). As typical with these threads, a heated debate ensued regarding the decision to bench Tomlinson. A more scathing thread in the same forum titled, "Will LT CRY LIKE A LITTLE BABY!?!?!?!," contained remarks chastising the running back for camera shots showing Tomlinson as he appeared to be sitting on the bench sulking instead of cheering on his team. One poster wrote, "I heard LT and TO[5] are meeting up at their favorite karaoke bar tonight. Their first number is going to be 'Crying' by Roy Orbison" (Ram Tough, 2008). Later, one fan

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[4] The prevalence of gender as a means to negatively characterize certain players and decisions warrants attention on its own. Unfortunately, giving proper treatment to this subject falls outside the scope of this project.

[5] TO refers to Terrell Owens, wide receiver for the Dallas Cowboys. Owens had recently cried during a television interview, drawing much attention from media and fans alike.

added, "Cant wait to watch SC [Sports Center] tonight and see him cry like a PUNK azz at the podium !" (Jason-34, 2008). A Tomlinson defender emerged in the familiar personal attack style saying, "Since he worked his whole life to play in this game and tried and was unable to go I'm sure he was disappointed. To the two guys who started this thread, you have probably never achieved anything so you can't be expected to understand. Stay at the bottom level of human society and don't reproduce" (Alex_SDCA, 2008). This type of personal attack is common in these threads and serves as a way to challenge not only the proposed characterization of a player, but also the source.

What separated the posters' comments regarding Tomlinson's injuries from the broadcast was the vitriol that became directed both towards him and towards the fellow posters. CBS maintained certain conventions and standards when discussing players. If a commentator believed a player was not living up to expectations they would certainly say so, but the level of criticism and attacks on individuals' character were minimal when compared to the treatment that was given on the audience-controlled message boards. As a result, the message board became a platform through which more scathing critiques and characterizations of players existed, and therefore became the online audience's instrument by which both the characters and the narrative of the game were co-constructed.

Match-ups

CBS Broadcast: Match-ups as a Running Narrative

Much of the commentary during the CBS broadcast dealt with player/player, player/opposing unit, or unit/unit match-ups. The match-ups were first introduced towards the beginning of the broadcast. This provided a reference for the comments that were made throughout the game. Most often remarks about match-ups occurred immediately after a play

when a commentator would discuss how a particular match-up allowed the play to succeed or fail.

At the onset of the game announcers framed the match-up between these two teams as "the undefeated Patriots" versus the Chargers – "winners of eight straight." This framed the contest as a battle between a perennial juggernaut and one of the most up-and-coming teams in the league. Once the game began, special attention was given to describing each offensive and defensive unit for each team. Surrounding these descriptions were comments like, "the [San Diego] offensive line must protect Rivers" from the "New England defense – second best in the league." Also, commentators matched "last year's MVP [LaDanian Tomlinson] against this year's [Patriots quarterback Tom Brady]." Referencing a previous game between these two teams, one commentator remarked how "these two teams met in the second week of the season when the San Diego defense was adapting to a new coaching staff – they are now better." Soon after these rather broad introductory match-ups were presented, commentators began introducing each starting player and his position on the field

Unit profiles introducing the viewers to each starting player on both teams provided the television audience with several player match-ups that would be followed throughout the game. After nearly every play commentators built upon the theme of player/player match-ups by describing how certain match-ups influenced the result of various plays. While much of the focus was given to these types of match-ups, commentators would frequently mix in broader match-up descriptions such as, "San Diego is one of the only teams to have the physical talent to challenge the New England offense." Regardless of the type of match-up described, CBS remained active in constructing and developing this theme throughout the game – much more so than the CBS and ESPN message boards.

CBS and ESPN Message Boards: Match-ups as Entrée to Other Themes

Despite the relatively large amount of attention given to player/player and unit/unit match-ups during the broadcast, the CBS San Diego message board remained quiet on these themes. A thread on the San Diego board titled, "croamatie [Cromartie] on moss!!!," suggested that the Chargers ought to place star cornerback Antonio Cromartie against New England star wide receiver Randy Moss. A friendly exchange emerged between four posters, but this was the only thread strictly devoted to player/player match-ups on this board.

The CBS and ESPN New England Patriots boards contained more threads devoted to match-ups, but for the most part lacked the intensity and furor of those threads devoted to individual player characterizations. One CBS New England thread that did elicit some heated exchanges was titled, "Keys to beating the Chargers offense." Here, the discussions largely centered on how certain defensive match-ups could be used to hamper the Chargers' offense, but oftentimes posts that directly attacked other posters took on a life of their own. A thread called, "Our Defense is Pathetic" on the ESPN New England board offered this: "They can't generate any kind of pass rush against a gimpy QB whatsoever," (PatsFanSince1972, 2008) but no real expansion of the theme emerged. An exhaustive "position-by-position comparison of the Chargers-Patriots game" (NHPatsfan, 2008) under the thread titled, "So now we know … or do we?" on the CBS New England message board provided one fan's analysis and projection based on comparisons of players in eight positions. However, the following posts rather quickly took on new topics.

The only thread found to have actual engagement with the theme of match-ups was titled, "Schlereth on Rome[6] – So now the Chargers…" on the CBS New England forum. However, the

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[6] "Schlereth on Rome" refers to former Denver Broncos lineman turned ESPN broadcaster Mark Schlereth on the popular radio/television program, "Rome is Burning."

creation of the match-up narrative remained broadly focused on the San Diego defense against the New England offense. As one poster wrote, "Yes the Patriots pass offense is SPECTACULAR but remember the are only human and they will EVENTUALLY make errors, now it depends if your opponents can capitalize on them…Maybe the chargers can, maybe they can't , will find out this coming sunday" (Strykr619, 2008). This post was typical of the others that followed. The intensity in creating the match-up theme did not come close to that of individual player characterizations.

Perhaps most important to note regarding the threads dealing with match-ups is what was absent. Whereas the threads dealing with the characterization of individual players sparked lively (and often crude) debates on the actual theme, the posts dealing with match-ups rarely elicited the same kind of debate. Instead, the discussions often veered into the personal attack realm where posters favored debating who among them was merely a "bandwaggoner" fan. This is not enough to say that these online fans were not interested in developing or creating narratives surrounding match-ups, but it can be said that the apparent engagement with match-up issues did not reach the level of the broadcast. As a result, the theme of "match-ups" was only valuable insofar as it could be employed as an introduction to debates surrounding other issues. This difference highlights the posters' ability to create their own meanings surrounding the game by neglecting to specifically engage the match-up narratives as much as the broadcast and instead, use the theme as a tool to engage in hostile banter and other topics.

In-Game Strategies

CBS Broadcast: In-Game Strategies Given Prominent, Yet Broad Treatment

The theme of in-game strategies occurred most often throughout the broadcast. Introductory remarks concerning strategies were introduced during the first quarter of play, when

the commentators presented the various methods both teams would employ. Discussions and analyses of strategy became more detailed only during the halftime report.

The first mention of in-game strategies occurred during the first offensive series of the game. One commentator began by stating, "talking to [San Diego coach] Norv Turner about how to run the offense today…," and finished with a more detailed account of what was in store strategically for the San Diego offense. Once the San Diego defense took the field for the first time more remarks were offered concerning the defensive strategies that New England could expect to see, followed with a comment that the San Diego defensive strategy would be different than the one employed when these teams met in week two of the season. A special segment titled "Football 'Phil'osophy" provided the audience with detailed descriptions of the types of strategies CBS commentator Phil Simms believed would work best for both New England and San Diego when the Patriots were on offense. Following the first quarter, the commentators began moving away from describing the types of expected strategies to assessing how they succeeded or failed.

After nearly every play at least one commentator described the strategy that was employed and commented on how it succeeded or failed. For example, following a description of the New England offense during the second quarter, one commentator explained how the "[San Diego] 'pressure' defense has worked so far," providing the audience with an assessment of San Diego's defensive effectiveness. Later at the end of the first half, San Diego was in a position to score. While the kicker was preparing to kick a field goal, New England coach Bill Belichick called a timeout. Commentators described this strategy as "icing" whereby a kicker is taken out of his rhythm. Following the timeout the kicker made the field goal. Commentators

remarked how successful the San Diego offensive strategy was in giving the Chargers confidence for the next half of play.

The halftime report was loaded with more specific strategic analyses and opinions. Commentators criticized the New England Patriots' offense for not incorporating star wide receiver Randy Moss into the game plan early on. They also mentioned that the San Diego defense had disrupted the New England offense stating, "Tom Brady is not 100 percent because of pressure." Concluding the discussions on strategy, one commentator added that New England ought to keep the same defensive strategy.

The second half of the broadcast contained similar descriptions and analyses of particular in-game strategies as the first half. While there was substantial attention given to this theme, the broadcasters were not able to give the same amount of attention to particular strategic decisions as the audience on the CBS and ESPN message boards. While most likely due to the need to keep up with the pace of the game, the commentators chose to cover a wide array of strategic decisions rather than focus on a few pivotal ones. The halftime report engaged the theme more specifically, but it was on the message boards that certain strategies were dissected and criticized much more so than on the broadcast.

CBS and ESPN Message Boards: In-Game Strategies and the Exhibition of Poster Knowledge and Credibility

Whereas the televised broadcast continually developed and expanded the theme of in-game strategies, the message boards tended to focus only on particular strategic topics. As such, the boards provided a more in-depth discourse concerning certain strategies but the gamut of in-game strategic topics discussed was significantly narrower than the televised broadcast. The result was not only the co-construction of meaning with respect to this topic, but the ability for

the posters to exhibit their knowledge of the game and to establish credibility within the online community.

The CBS New England message board contained a thread titled, ""When did you know..?," where the author offered his analysis concerning the pivotal strategic move that secured the Patriots' victory. Part of the post read, "For myself, I knew with about 9:20 or so left in the game. Patriots up 9, Chargers facing a 4th and 10 from the Patriots 36 ... and they punted. I was almost shouting at the screen – 'punting? are you kidding me? Game over - Patriots win. We've won!' (Yes, I actually said that - as my wife, she was stunned I'd say that.) It was a good punt by Mike Scifres, and Kevin Faulk downed it at the 13" (NHPatsFan, 2008). Following this opening post were several others with varying analyses dealing with why this particular in-game decision marked the beginning of the end for San Diego's hopes. One poster offered this: "I'm in agreement with nhpats and bradyard on this. It was exactly at that point 9:20 to go in the 4th quarter, when SD elected to punt that I truly knew the Pat's would win. It's an interesting topic to consider. I believe a team when playing on the road and/or playing a better team (especially when the stakes are high) has to do something from a risk standpoint to come away with a 'W'. Most of the time, that road team or underdog needs to take an early lead and maintain a lead of some sort" (MADDOG_ROMEO, 2008). This level of engagement revealed a more in-depth discourse than the broadcast and a desire by the online fans to elaborate the game's narrative. Members of the online community, moved by this particular in-game strategy, discussed implications and offered opinions concerning the decision, establishing themselves as connoisseurs of the sport. Because of their desire to establish themselves in terms of their football knowledge, the posters presented themselves as worthy commentators, able experts

existing alongside the "professionals" on CBS who stopped short of satiating the online community's desire for analysis and critique.

Over on the CBS San Diego board posters most often chose to elaborate on what they saw as pivotal in-game decisions that led to their loss. In a thread called "Final Thoughts," posters focused on the decision to punt in the fourth quarter writing, "I do have a few coaching complaints to make…4th and 10 - 12 minutes left (I think), down by 9, and on the opponent 36. Punt??? PUNTTTT?????…" (ChargerguyAZ, 2008). Another poster followed lamenting the decision to punt saying, "4 FGs don't cut it .. at some point, you have to go for it! And in the 4th quarter, down by 9, it's 4 down territory, but not for the Chargers" (mtnchrgrfan, 2008). One fan was more forgiving saying, "On the coaching decision to punt on 4th -10 at the Pats 36 with 9:13 on the clock. Obviously this could be debated forever by us Mon AM QB's. At the time I thought he might go for it, but looking back the defense HAD been doing a respectable job all day, and the chances were likely that the Chargers would get the ball back with enough time to score (twice) maybe? I think [San Diego Coach] Norv probably went with the percentages, and lost" (boltnut47, 2008). This back and forth aided in the creation of meaning behind this decision by expanding on what occurred in the broadcast. For these posters, in-game strategies are important insomuch as they contribute to a team's victory or defeat. By expressing frustration or understanding, the posters filled and analytical gap left by the CBS broadcasters. Assuming the role themselves, posters contextualized the pivotal in-game decision in terms of what was most important – wins and losses. Moreover, through this process the individual members of the online community established themselves via their football knowledge and ability to act alongside not only the broadcasters, but also the coaches.

The ESPN San Diego board contained similar sentiments regarding this in-game decision. Under the thread, "Face it [Coach] Norv cost them the game…," the author sparked a discussion with "[Coach] Norv punted instead of not going for it down by 2 scores in the 4th quarter? Are you friggen kidding me? I couldn't believe it. I knew the game was over. Of course BB [New England Coach Bill Belichick] ran the clock out… Good call or bad call? What you guys think?" (Scringe, 2008). Additionally, a thread in the same forum titled, "we got out coached no excuse truth," offered more critiques of in-game strategies and decisions. These comments supported the assertion that these fans believed, at least to some level, that their knowledge of football and its various strategic elements could trump that of the San Diego coaches. More importantly, specific discussions of in-game strategies allowed these posters to establish credibility within the online community as true connoisseurs of the game.

The difference in treatment of "in-game strategies" between CBS and the online community reflects, on one level, a difference in conventions whereby the network must employ brief descriptions of certain events in order to keep up with the flow of the game. The online community; however, maintains conventions of filling in analytical gaps left by the broadcasters. As such, they act not only alongside the broadcasters in their elaboration of pivotal in-game decisions, but also alongside coaches and players as "armchair" quarterbacks – critiquing and defending various decisions and actions.

Weather

CBS Broadcast: Framing Weather as the Persistent X-Factor

The theme of weather was unique to the broadcast. CBS used weather to set the stage and framed it as a potential impediment to both teams. By discussing this theme early, the

broadcast also used weather to contextually frame other themes such as in-game strategies and individual player characterizations.

Part of the broadcast's introduction included a description of the temperature and wind at the site of the game, Foxboro, Massachusetts, with commentators giving their opinions on how the cold wind would impact the players and strategies. Sideline reporter Steve Tasker, commenting on pre-game warm-ups, described how the wind carried the ball while it was in the air. He mentioned, "whichever team is forced to put the ball up in the air…it's going to be a real gamble because you don't know where it's going to come down." This early presentation of the wind as a significant factor helped to frame other themes.

Comments immediately preceding certain plays such as, "gusts have quieted" and "New England going into the wind" helped to frame the theme of "in-game strategies" in terms of the weather. "Brady interception on a cold, windy day" suggested that the quarterback's error could be attributed to the elements, thereby framing the theme of "individual player characterizations" in terms of the weather. The final mention of weather occurred in the fourth quarter when one announcer mentioned that San Diego has played exceptionally well in the cold – beyond many expectations. Thus again, the characterization and analysis of the Chargers' performance was framed in terms of the environmental conditions. The above comments provided environmental context for a large portion of the game and suggested that weather was a persistent 'X-factor.'

The attention given to weather by CBS indicated that they felt it was of prime importance in framing the game's narratives. Weather was presented as a potential impediment to San Diego, as a factor when New England took the field on offense, and as an excuse for player errors. Natural elements are always mentioned during football broadcasts, even during games that are played indoors. While the convention exists across all games, its application differs

depending on how the television network wishes to frame various elements of particular games. Although weather was mentioned several times and during each quarter of play, the online message board audience did not discuss or elaborate on this theme.

<u>Injuries</u>

CBS Broadcast: San Diego's Crippled Army

The final theme to be discussed from the CBS broadcast is injuries. San Diego was plagued with several players who were not able to perform at their peak level. While sometimes tied to the theme of individual player characterizations, injuries were often discussed without any additional comments regarding the players' character and therefore required their own treatment as a unique theme.

Part of the introduction to the game included a list and description of all the San Diego Chargers who were hampered by injury. Some of these players included Phillip Rivers, LaDanian Tomlinson, and Antonio Gates. These players' injuries were mentioned throughout the game, leading the commentators to remark on how valuable the Chargers' backup players have been to the team. Midway through the second quarter a caption with all of the injured San Diego players appeared followed by another similar piece at the beginning of the third quarter. In this way injuries were treated not only as a means to characterize the afflicted players, but also as a theme in itself that impacted strategy and the presence of backup players, as well.

Whereas the broadcast took the injury theme and discussed its implications for strategy, player characterizations, and backup players, the message board focused exclusively on how injuries helped frame the character of individual players, such as Phillip Rivers and LaDanian Tomlinson. This indicated that CBS was interested in how the injuries would impact the

narratives of the entire game, not just how they would impact the perceptions of the injured players.

<u>Next season</u>

CBS and ESPN Message Boards: Audience Development, Expansion, and Hope

The theme of "next season" was only found on the message boards. Interestingly, CBS did not choose to address the future, but instead left narrative expansion and speculation up to the fans. This afforded the online community an opportunity to frame their own discussions on the future with little direct influence from CBS producers.

Under the CBS San Diego thread, "Weird How It Turned Out," one poster wrote, "I will say 'next year'. We have all our key starters under contract, a good GM and the second most cap space to play with" (Alex_SDCA, 2008). Another poster added, "This roster will be intack and all we need to add to it now is a couple of young defense of tackle/nose guards, running backs cos we will not have M. Turner back next year. Maybe a young free safety to replace McCree in a year or two. I look forward to a NE type of year for the Boltz next season. We should breeze through the AFC west with no problem" (SDFAYFUL, 2008). The ESPN San Diego message board chimed in as well with threads titled, "I am excited for next season" and "AFC West next season." Despite CBS choosing to exclude any analyses or projections for the San Diego Chargers, the fans on the message boards appeared more than willing to offer a wide array of potential narratives and themes, framing next season without the television network.

Under these threads, audiences acted as producers offering possible themes and narratives for next season. Their eagerness to expand on what was essentially a final episode indicated a strong attachment to not only the game of football, but also to the individual teams and players. Furthermore, this speculation and expansion served as evidence that the audience drew on

multiple resources for knowledge surrounding the game. Nowhere did the online audience speculate on how CBS or any other television network would deliver the games, indicating an independence from larger entities to provide them with meanings surrounding the games. Perhaps CBS did not comment on the future because they felt it unnecessary, acknowledging football fans are an active demographic, drawing from a variety of resources to understand what events will unfold in the future. Therefore, one might say CBS simply "allowed" the fans to develop their own speculations, themes, and narratives. However, regardless of whether or not CBS intended to leave future narrative development and expansion up to the audience, the message board community nonetheless demonstrated an independence from the network by setting the stage for next season themselves. This is a hungry fan base that gathered to project and develop hypothetical storylines and themes as soon as immediately following a final broadcast of their team in action.

Media coverage

CBS and ESPN Message Boards: Setting Standards of Appropriate Sports Broadcasting

The final major theme found within the message boards was "media coverage." This theme was particularly interesting because it demonstrated the audience's ability to interpret and reject the narrative or thematic offerings of the network producers. By doing so the audience became active critics, satirizing and rejecting certain elements of the network's presentation that they believed inappropriately characterized the game. On the other hand, it remained the case that the audience continued to rely on the network producers to provide the televised content, despite taking oppositional readings of it.

Since the San Diego Chargers were pitted as the "underdogs" in this contest, it was not surprising that nearly all of the discussions of media coverage occurred on the San Diego

message board. Threads titled "CBS bias – experts picks" and "FCUK the experts!!!!" left few questions regarding how the audience felt about how the CBS commentators were framing the game. Revealed in these posts was not only how passionate (and oftentimes manic) the audience was about their team, but how they assumed co-ownership of the content, creating their own meaning in opposition to the media coverage.

One poster in the "FCUK the experts!!!!" thread stated, "they are getting on my nerves!!!!!! (Patriots are too good, rivers talks too much, Chargers are too injured, brady is a king, chargers a second class team, chargers lucky to get this far, chargers too banged up, score predictions of 34-14,36-10, 42-17, no one will stop perfection.. sorry just tired of my team being looked down on and put down constantly)" (vikboltz, 2008). On the "Chargers already out? From a Giants fan" thread in the same forum, one fan wrote, "The Experts are so impressed with their non bias analysis that they forgot one ingredient. Heart. Both the Chargers & the Giants went into those games with tons of heart & a belief that they could win the games no matter what they were hearing" (Cool Papa 52, 2008). In rejecting a perceived bias against their team, the San Diego fans convened to construct an alternative interpretation of their team. These posters took comments regarding the San Diego Chargers quite personally. Phrases used by the message board community such as "my team" indicated that at least some of these posters maintained an emotional attachment to their respective teams, and hearing or reading comments that seemed to discredit or call into question their team's ability struck a sensitive nerve.

Although the San Diego boards contained the majority of content concerning media coverage, there was some relevant activity on the ESPN New England boards. A lighthearted yet significant thread titled, "Whats your John Madden comment for todays game?" satirized the seasoned broadcaster. Posts included mindless comments such as, "Which ever team scores the

most points will win" (LeonardRussell32, 2008). By satirizing Madden the online audience felt

free to reject the authority of the network's producers and commentators.

    As the threads and posts concerning media coverage indicated, the online audience's

personal beliefs carried significant weight while the network's voice carried little authoritative

value. By rejecting and satirizing elements of the broadcast, the audience became responsible for

constructing their own standards concerning how the game ought to have been presented and

perceived.

Chapter 4: NFC Championship Game

The second game to be presented in this section is the NFC (National Football Conference) Championship Game between the New York Giants and the Green Bay Packers broadcast on FOX. The game began at 6:30pm eastern time on January 20, 2008, and took place at historic Lambeau Field in Green Bay, Wisconsin. Calling the game were commentators Joe Buck and Troy Aikman. Buck has been calling professional baseball and football games for FOX since 1994. He took over veteran Pat Summerall's position with the network in 2002 to become the lead play-by-play commentator. Aikman derives his credibility as a three-time Super Bowl champion with the Dallas Cowboys. He joined FOX as a color-commentator in 2001 and has been partnered with Buck since 2002. Pam Oliver and Chris Myers served as field-reporters. Like the AFC broadcast, the field reporters were not heard from much except to give updates concerning playing conditions and player updates.

Green Bay's star quarterback, Brett Favre, was playing in his 17th season in the National Football League. 16 of those 17 seasons were played with the Green Bay Packers. Rumors of his retirement had been discussed for two years leading up to the 2007 season, as his age became a central talking point on both television and radio sports programs. New York's young quarterback, Eli Manning, had been battling to establish his own identity apart from his older brother, Peyton, who had won the Super Bowl the previous season with the Indianapolis Colts. Questions regarding whether the athlete would ever be able to reach the level of his older brother had been swarming television and radio sports programs throughout his NFL career.

As temperatures hovered around zero degrees throughout the entire game, Green Bay was thought to have the upper hand. It was a close fought match between the two teams with six lead changes lasting through two overtime periods. The New York Giants won the game after Brett

Favre threw his last NFL pass – an interception to New York defensive back Corey Webster, which set up the game-winning New York field goal. The final score was 23-20, New York Giants.

Like the AFC game, the FOX commentators followed several conventions. These included descriptions of the weather, starting players, discussions of relevant injuries, analyses of offensive and defensive match-ups, descriptions of in-game strategies, in-depth halftime analyses, post-game analyses, along with other topics. Additionally, the commentators regularly engaged in friendly banter and sometimes discussed topics that were not directly related to the game. These conventions that the commentators followed allowed for several themes to emerge.

Major Themes

Like the CBS broadcast of the AFC Championship game, the FOX broadcast used its opening segment to set its thematic course. Nearly all of the opening comments could be traced back to five themes: individual player characterizations, match-ups, in-game strategies, weather, and Super Bowl. There were other themes present in the broadcast such as "Lambeau Field," "referees/penalties," and "injuries," but FOX did not give these the same amount of treatment as the five listed above.

Individual Player Characterizations

FOX Broadcast: Brett Favre as The Iconic Figurehead of the National Football League

FOX did everything short of framing the entire game as homage to Brett Favre. Rumors had been circulating years before the game concerning his impending retirement, and as the statistical leader in nearly every NFL passing record, Favre was elevated to an iconic status. As such, he was given more attention than any other player during the broadcast. Commentators

gave special treatment to his past performances, his statistical achievements during this game, and often presented the game as if it were Favre versus the New York Giants.

Favre's past performances were often presented as pre-produced packages with video clips and statistics. These were delivered several times throughout the game, establishing the quarterback as one of the stars of not only the game, but the entire National Football League. During one such package, FOX presented every statistical category of which Favre was the all-time leader. The presentation of his past achievements painted him as a hero and as a one of the greatest quarterbacks to ever play in the NFL. Later in the game, Favre was faced with leading his team down the field in an attempt to win the game in the last minutes. Again, FOX presented a package highlighting all of the fourth quarter game-winning plays he has achieved throughout his career. The presentation of the star quarterback's past performances aided in the construction of his character by painting him as a seasoned veteran who has achieved record-breaking feats through heroic past performances.

FOX interrupted the broadcast several times to update viewers on Favre's statistical achievements during the game. This allowed the fans to track his progress and, as a result, elevated Favre's efforts above others who were simultaneously on the field. Constantly tracking the quarterback's performance allowed the viewers to become more connected with him than most of the other players.

Additionally, comments such as "Favre will have to answer without help from the running game" and "what will Brett Favre do now?" pitted the athlete as an equal contender against the New York Giants. By framing the contest this way, FOX privileged him over the other Green Bay Packers and created the narrative of "Favre versus the New York Giants."

FOX was certainly favorable towards Favre when constructing his character for the television audience. By giving special attention to his past feats, tracking his performance throughout the game, and presenting several moments of the game as Favre versus the New York Giants, the athlete was characterized as a heroic veteran and one of, if not the, leader of the Green Bay Packers. The message boards; however, would not find it so easy to elevate Favre to such a high position without significant opposition.

CBS and ESPN Message Boards: The Struggle Over the Construction of Brett Favre

Many message board posters questioned whether Favre's time had expired and whether he was still a valuable member of the Green Bay Packers. Some characterized him as old and past his prime while others were more sympathetic. Heated debates ensued with posters struggling over how to construct the Brett Favre character. The result was the construction of a conflict narrative – one that centered on how to characterize the seasoned veteran.

In the harshly titled CBS Green Bay Packers thread, "Waste!," one poster wrote, "I want favre gone. I am sick of watching this idiot lose games this way for us" (buckypower1, 2008). Three minutes later a reply followed with, "dude are you even a Packers fan??? i guess all the game winning drives that Favre has had in his career just go out the window" (Athlete524, 2008). Debates like this were found throughout the message boards. On the ESPN Green Bay message board the thread, "Favre should be benched" offered, "What a BUM. The Packers are in this game despite him. They're lucky to not be down 20 with the horrible plays he's made out there. Throwing balls up for grabs and making poor decision after poor decision. The Packers would be better off without his services. Dude is embarrassing himself" (JasonHartrules, 2008). Meanwhile another CBS Green Bay thread titled "Farve," a poster cited the Packers' achievements under Favre with this: "Q. Since Brett Favre took over as the starting QB in 1992,

which teams have the best overall regular season record? A. Since September 27, 1992, the date

of Brett Favre's first start, Green Bay is 160-93 (.632), the best record for any team in the NFL

over that period. Next-best is Pittsburgh, at 156-96-1 (.619) and then Denver, at 152-101 (.601)"

(winbucky, 2008). No other player received as many comments as Brett Favre. At the same

time, no other player appeared more polarizing than Brett Favre.

The characterizations of Favre on the message boards further indicated the online

audience's eagerness to engage in character development along with the televised broadcast.

More than that, the discrepancies surrounding the construction of his character on the message

boards revealed a conflict narrative. Rather than allowing FOX (who was relatively generous

when speaking of the quarterback) to have exclusive license concerning the construction of his

character, the online fans became extremely active in bringing in their own analyses. The end

result was a dichotomous characterization of the athlete – he was both an iconic figurehead and

an impediment preventing the Green Bay Packers from advancing to the Super Bowl.

FOX Broadcast: Eli Manning as Heir-Apparent

FOX's treatment and construction of Eli Manning reflected the discourse of the past few

years concerning whether the young quarterback would ever be able to establish himself apart

from his successful brother, Peyton. Like Favre, he was presented as the leader of the New York

Giants with commentators often making the same sorts of comments regarding "Manning versus

the Green Bay Packers;" however, the hero narratives surrounding Favre surpassed what was

bestowed upon Manning. Once the New York Giants achieved victory, calls of his emergence as

the newest icon of the NFL became more apparent.

Comparative treatments between Manning and Favre occupied a great deal of the

conversation regarding the athlete. A metaphoric "passing of the baton" could be seen as

commentators touched on Eli's potential while focus on Favre remained limited to his past achievements. At the same time, the Giants star faced comparison with his older brother who had already achieved legendary status as the quarterback of the Indianapolis Colts. This intertwinement of the athletes poised Manning as the "heir-apparent" while simultaneously questioned whether he would ever be able to surpass the achievements of his older brother.

As the game concluded, focus became directly placed on Eli, as comments regarding his emergence as a prolific quarterback propelled the athlete beyond the characterizations preceding the victory. Thus the entire game's meaning became reframed as a "proving ground" for Manning and once he had risen to the task, permission was granted for the commentators to wax poetic on his achievements and future.

CBS and ESPN Message Boards: Introducing the NFL's Newest Legend

The message boards contained several threads attempting to construct Eli Manning's character. They were relatively positive compared to the threads on Phillip Rivers and LaDanian Tomlinson, but certainly contained the same fervent engagement with the theme. For the most part discussions surrounding the athlete dealt with whether or not he would be able to secure his legacy with a victory and, once it appeared he had, largely consisted of high praise with little resistance from fellow posters. The result was not just the creation, but also the development of a narrative. Eli Manning was the focus of high hopes and expectations, and once he has secured a victory the narrative turned to one of high praise and the quarterback's elevation to legendary status.

A thread in the ESPN New York Giants forum titled "This game is a huge defining moment for Eli" contained the post, "But if they win, and he beats the Legend Brett Favre in GB, in the frozen cold, and winning 3 straight games on the road. He will be considered , I don't want

to say a Legend. But he will be close up there to a legend, especially in NY Sports areas" (DaGoods8426, 2008). In the same forum a thread titled "Do you guys really think Eli can get it done," the author wrote, "I think the deep down inside every Giants fan is wondering when the REAL Eli is going to show up and sh-it the bed. He may show up and pull another rabbit out of his hat today but I doubt it..." (vbskinsfan, 2008). Despite the pessimism in the opening post, those that followed were optimistic about Manning's chances with comments such as, "Actually deep down inside I know we haven't seen the best of Eli yet" (mdog1111, 2008) and "Of course he can get it done…And I think he will today" (no1betta96, 2008). Once it appeared that Manning would be able to secure a victory, the praise began to grow louder and the narrative turned to one of the construction of a legend.

Threads with high praise for Manning contained titles that left little doubt as to how the authors felt. Under the ESPN New York Giants message board there were threads titled "Eli God Manning" and "To All the Guys Who Have Supported Eli" that contained posts quick to elevate the athlete to legendary status. The CBS New York Giants message board thread titled, "Has Eli Manning been the QB the Giants hoped he" also contained several posts that lauded Manning's efforts. One poster wrote, "No matter what his numbers were in the regular season, he stepped his game to another level in the playoffs, and thats what you want from your QB" (ksychic, 2008). However, there were a few posters who were less quick to write favorably of Manning. As one wrote, "He needs to be good every 3 out of 4 games consistently at the least to be what a fan would hope for. Consistency is what makes a great QB, the good ones dont make many mistakes. All the starting QBs in the NFL have great games and great stretches of games" (nepatssb, 2008). Despite a few comments throughout various threads like this one, fans were largely anxious to crown the quarterback hero of the game.

The treatment of Manning was both similar to and different from the treatment of Favre, Rivers, and Tomlinson. The actual tone and the narrative construction were certainly different with posters acting much more willing to praise Manning. However, the treatment of all four athletes was similar in that they all became constructed and characterized by the online audience.

An interesting element to the characterization of Manning by the online community was how intertwined its development was with Favre. Posters simultaneously created narratives of a dying icon and an emerging hero, as if one was to replace the other. There were few comments on FOX directly comparing the two athletes, but the online community was active in their attempts to situate the two in relation to each other. Revealed in this process is a desire (perhaps impulse) for football fans not only to establish heroic figures, but to create a hierarchy, as well.

Match-ups

FOX Broadcast: The Burress/Harris "Slugfest"

Match-ups were presented throughout the broadcast, with commentators discussing player/player, player/unit, and unit/unit match-ups. As in the AFC game, nearly every play was followed by an assessment of how the particular match-ups allowed for certain results. However, although the presentation and analysis of match-ups were presented throughout the broadcast on a broad section of topics, the theme mostly consisted on the level of player-to-player. FOX gave special attention to New York Giants star receiver Plaxico Burress against Green Bay Packers top cornerback Al Harris. This particular match-up was introduced at the onset of the broadcast and developed throughout the game to the very end.

An interview with Harris immediately preceding the kickoff contained questions surrounding his match-up with Burress. The cornerback's response was a simple, "we're just trying to win." Throughout the game the camera followed these two athletes during most of the

plays. Video recaps following each segment showed the two players engaging in minor altercations. One commentator used the phrase "slugfest" to describe the match-up.

The focus on this particular match-up carried over into the halftime report where special segments allowed the commentators to discuss the two athletes further. Early in the third quarter a camera focused on Harris and Burress engaging in what one commentator described as "jawing" after a rather physical play. Later in the same quarter FOX replayed a clip of Burress walking towards the Green Bay bench shouting "he can't cover me."

The use of the words "slugfest" and "jawing," the persistent camera shots of the two athletes throughout the entire game, and the discussions of the match-up during the broadcast and halftime report elevated the Burress/Harris match-up above all others. Moreover, through these actions, FOX dramatized the Burress/Harris match-up as a running narrative, a hostile back-and-forth between two of the elite athletes in the NFL. While FOX certainly introduced other match-ups, such as the Packers' linebackers versus the Giants offensive line, the Giants' running backs against the Packers' linebackers, and even Eli Manning versus Brett Favre, none reached the level of development as Plaxico Burress and Al Harris. However, despite the amount of attention given to these two athletes during the broadcast, very little was given on the CBS and ESPN message boards.

One might point to football's elevation of certain positions as a reason why the online community avoided developing this particular match-up. Quarterbacks and running backs are most often the athletes that receive the most praise and scrutiny from fans, hence the large focus by the ESPN and CBS message boards on Favre, Manning, and Tomlinson. Wide receivers and defensive backs such as Burress and Harris, while instrumental to the actual game itself, exist quite a bit lower in the positional hierarchy.

CBS and ESPN Message Boards: Selective Expansion of Match-ups and Poster Credibility

The match-up theme consisted of fans predicting how each team would match against the other and how individual players would respond against opposing players. The message boards did not produce the same broad level of play-by-play match-up analysis as did the televised broadcast, but did construct their own narratives around particular match-ups that sparked their interests. Furthermore, the level of engagement with constructing narratives around certain match-ups was much higher and more detailed than in the San Diego and New England message boards. As a result, the posters developed particular match-ups while establishing their credibility as knowledgeable fans.

Preceding the game a thread on the CBS Green Bay board titled, "It's here!" offered one poster's prediction on how certain match-ups would evolve throughout the game. The fan wrote, "Packers will eventually shut down the Giants running game and hold their offense to just a few field goals. Brett [Favre] will be able to pick apart a secondary that has been devastated by injuries and that will allow Ryan Grant to gain about 140 yards and score a couple of touchdowns on the day. Look for Eli [Manning] to throw a few picks" (pokethebear, 2008). A more extensive pre-game analysis of match-ups was offered in another CBS Green Bay thread titled "Position matchup Giants and Packers," where a post contained one fan's analysis of how the Packers would fare against each unit of the New York Giants (Fumblestruck, 2008). These pre-game posts aided in constructing potential narratives surrounding the match-up theme while establishing poster credibility through the presentation of football knowledge.

The "Packers Vs. Giants Breakdown" thread in the ESPN New York message board offered several posters' detailed remarks on how certain match-ups would impact the game. On the CBS New York board under the thread, "What do you think of the Giants chances Sunday?,"

one poster set the discussion asking, "…when the Packers go 5 wide with no TE's and no RB's in to block how well are the Packers front 5 going to do against the Giants ferocious front 4?" (munson1500, 2008). Several posts followed with highly technical, detailed descriptions of how this and other potential match-ups could affect the course of the game. Presenting match-ups in this knowledgeable manner granted the posters authority and credibility amongst the fellow posters while expanding some of the game's narratives

Although the online fans did not construct the match-up theme like the broadcast by recapping each play and describing how the match-ups produced certain results, they were active in creating detailed descriptions of potential match-ups before the game. The type of engagement with this theme was not as broad as the televised presentation, but at particular points was certainly more detailed. By constructing the theme this way, the posters provided complementary material to the broadcast that, when coupled together, produced a more complex and exhaustive presentation of the game's narratives. Furthermore, by discussing in detail the schematics and effects of particular match-ups, the posters demonstrated their football knowledge and established credibility amongst the online community.

In-Game Strategies

FOX Broadcast: In-Game Strategies as Running Narrative

In-game strategies were mentioned after nearly every play, but specific details about the strategies were reserved for the halftime report. There was some discussion of one particular strategy, but for the most part, strategic discussions were broad and fleeting.

The FOX commentators first discussed the theme of "in-game strategies" in terms of what the audience could "expect to see" from the offensive and defensive units and in terms of individual players. During the first quarter, one commentator mentioned that the audience could

expect to see "more defensive pressure" from the New York Giants and that Green Bay coaches wanted to employ a counter passing attack to "see if Eli's arm can beat them."

Much like the CBS broadcast of the AFC championship game, the theme of strategy was most often presented following each play when a commentator would describe which strategy was employed and whether or not it was successful. The halftime report, which typically delved deeper into themes presented during the game, provided a more detailed analysis of the strategic decisions by both teams with several commentators giving their opinions of which would produce the best results. Detailed treatment of specific in-game strategies was rare during the actual game play, although there was one instance in the third quarter when commentators remarked that Green Bay's "screen game,"[7] which has always been important, was not available due to the effectiveness of the New York defense. Mention of the screen game appeared again in the fourth quarter, but this was the most attention specific strategies were given during the actual game play.

In sum, FOX gave broad treatment to the theme of in-game strategies; however, the theme was consistently reintroduced after nearly every play when a commentator would outline the schematics and effectiveness of the strategy employed. The audience posting on the CBS and ESPN message boards would take the theme of in-game strategies and develop it by focusing on particular strategic decisions they felt were pivotal in influencing the outcome of the game.

CBS and ESPN Message Boards: In-Game Strategies and the Exhibition of Poster Knowledge and Credibility

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[7] "Screen game" broadly refers to a particular offensive passing strategy used to combat an overly aggressive defense.

Some threads concerning in-game strategies were created immediately preceding the game with posters discussing potential strategies that would lead their team to victory, while other threads created during the broadcast criticized certain strategic decisions. Unlike the San Diego and New England message boards the New York and Green Bay message boards contained poster-created "Official Game Threads" that contained minute-by-minute analyses and critiques of in-game strategies. However, the thematic and narrative developments surrounding in-game strategies looked similar to the other message boards.

A CBS New York thread titled, "Biggest Key to victory Sunday?" contained posters presenting their own opinions of the types of strategies that would work best against the Green Bay Packers. Posters made comments such as, "Come on Gaints fans pressuring Brett isn't the key. He isn't some green horn who can't recognize and escape a rush. If you were to win it would be because you were able to establish the run and work off the play action" (DankGreenCheese, 2008) and "The Giants need to cover effectively and not let Brett Pick them apart. I really think the secondary of the Giants D wins or loses this game..." (Casper101011, 2008). Comments that offered strategic suggestions were found on the Green Bay message boards, as well. On the ESPN Green Bay boards one thread titled, "I hope we kick off first" contained several posts discussing the potential benefits for the Packers in deciding to kick to New York to begin the game, and as a result, receive the kick off to start the second half. The author wrote, "I like sending the defense out first. I think we go out, get a 3 and out[8] and get good field position. Hopefully they win the toss this week" (olemisspackerfan4, 2008). The remaining posts in this thread agreed with the author's recommendation.

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[8] "3 and out" refers to a defense preventing an offense from achieving a single "first-down," thus forcing the offense to kick the ball to the other team.

While there were several threads that offered strategic suggestions, there were also several that criticized certain in-game decisions. The thread "Good for Tynes, but field goals lose ballgames" under The ESPN New York message boards offered a handful of posters that criticized the Giants for not being able to score touchdowns, and instead, having to settle for field goals. A poster under this thread remarked, "So far the Giants inability to put it in the endzone is why the score is what it is (imo). They need a drive similar to that against Dallas before the half. Even a field goal would be momentus" (bostonstillsux19, 2008). On the ESPN Green Bay board threads titled, "Get some safety help on Burress," "Just fall on the darn ball already," and "Why didn't McCarthy call a timeout…" offered critiques of the Packers' perceived strategic blunders. Under "Why didn't McCarthy call a timeout," many posters criticized Green Bay head coach Mike McCarthy's decision not to call a timeout before overtime. The critiques soon became intense with posters calling him a "moron" (Damonin0, 2008) and stating, "that was horrible u have to call a timeout in this cold make the kicker, snapper and holder sit in the cold just a few minutes longer I would have called 2 timeouts. I did not understand that at all" (twoweb, 2008). As a result of these and other highly technical and critical posts, the community established themselves as worthy analysts and students of the game alongside commentators and coaches. Moreover, the posters used their discussion of particular strategies as a means to situate themselves within the community, employing technical terms to bolster their credibility.

These patterns reveal that more than elaborating beyond the broadcast; the posters developed the theme in a way to exhibit their knowledge surrounding the game. In this way, the theme of in-game strategies was developed similarly on both the message boards concerning the AFC game and the NFC game. By focusing and developing particular in-game strategies, the posters developed credibility within the online community through the exhibition of their

football knowledge. Furthermore, while the trend to focus only on particular strategic instances rather than to give broad treatment of many strategies offered a limited portrayal of the game's themes and narratives, when coupled with the broadcast's presentation, it allowed the fans to engage in thematic and narrative development beyond what was presented on the television screen. Thus the entire presentation of in-game strategies was co-constructed by both FOX and the online community.

Weather

FOX Broadcast: Weather as the Third Team

Weather was perhaps the most prominent theme, mentioned the most throughout the entire presentation of the game and used to open nearly every segment. Temperatures in Green Bay hovered around zero with wind chills around 23 degrees below zero. The field became blanketed with snow. Commentators were eager to discuss how the weather would affect individual players, strategies, and even used the frigid temperatures to joke amongst themselves. The inclement weather was not new to Lambeau Field. The site has long been notorious for its freezing conditions, and commentators seized on its reputation throughout the broadcast. In 1967, the "Ice Bowl" between the Green Bay Packers and Dallas Cowboys marked the coldest recorded football game in history. The legendary game has since been referenced quite frequently when broadcasters and fans alike discuss Green Bay's home field advantage. As such, the Packers' standing as a hard-nose football team in the face of even the most grueling elements had well preceded this game.

Several pre-game player interviews were shown at the beginning of the game with reactions to how the cold would affect individual performances, strategies, and the outcome of the game. Player reactions to the cold were mentioned throughout the first half. During the

halftime report, some comments focused on how the offensive players were taking a long time to warm up because of the frigid conditions.

Some of the first comments also dealt with how the cold weather would affect the teams' strategies. One commentator mentioned how it would impede Green Bay's "ability to throw" and how they would have to "rely on the running game." Other remarks throughout the game occurred in between plays when commentators would attribute certain results to the freezing conditions. The third quarter opened with a segment concerning how each offense had dealt with the cold strategically.

Weather was used to complement nearly every aspect of the game – from describing the status of players to in-game strategies to describing the atmosphere in the stadium. The result was the construction of "weather" as a third team, impacting nearly every facet of Giants' and Packers' performances. The same type of treatment regarding weather was seen in the message boards as the online audience tended to focus the same amount of attention, although presenting their own unique variation of the theme.

CBS and ESPN Message Boards: Weather Used to Contextualize Other Themes

While not largely present in the San Diego and New England message boards, weather was an instrumental theme found in the message board construction of the NFC game. Obviously, the majority of posts surrounding the theme of weather focused on how the sub-zero wind chill would affect various aspects of the game – from players to match-ups to strategies. In doing so, the posters contextualized the various themes in terms of the weather.

The aptly titled ESPN Green Bay thread, "Brrrrrrr" contained two pages of posters commenting on weather forecasts and past games that have been played in freezing temperatures. "Will the Temperature in Green Bay affect the Packers?" dealt more specifically with how the

players would respond to the frigid conditions. The author wrote, "I believe the temperature will affect them. they have some young guys on the team and look how they played against the bears back in the regulare season. the only difference now is the weather is going to be even worse" (Buckeyepride47, 2008). There was some disagreement; however, with another fan writing, "There is no way the temperature will effect either team trying to play out their game plan. The Packers will try to do what they normally do, short passes and run, then when Giants try to take away short pass they will go over the top. On D the Pack will try to take away the run and make Eli beat them" (pack84532, 2008). This sentiment was seen in the ESPN New York boards, as well.

Under a thread titled "Weather" posters commented, "I seriously do not get why everyone thinks the weather is going to be the deciding factor in this game…" (bcaban92, 2008) and "I think this is the most over-talked about topic leading into this game…" (wheresdavebrown, 2008). The theme of weather was not only discussed in terms of how it would affect individual players, but in-game strategy and match-ups, as well.

A fan in the ESPN Green Bay "Put ALL homer'ism aside…" thread referenced the infamous "Ice Bowl" of 1967 writing, "....more TDs were scored through the air than on the ground in the Ice Bowl. High winds and wet condiitons affect the pass game more than cold weather" (Justifier66, 2008). The ESPN New York board contained a thread titled "Eli, don't worry about the cold" where someone hypothesized that "…this game will be won on the ground. If Favre wants to throw rockets in 1 degree weather, good luck" (njmatty17, 2008). Perhaps the most detailed post liking the theme of weather to match-ups, strategies, and individual player performance was found on the CBS Green Bay thread titled, "IT'S ALL ABOUT THE WIND…" where the author remarked, "If there is little to no wind - I think we

destroy the Giants. If it is windy - it's going to be close…I personally believe we could throw all day on them. Sloppy field conditions, two very solid offensive tackles, and short/quick routes is going to equalize their pass rush. On the other side of the ball - Shockey being out of the game is huge. Al Harris vs a banged up Burress and Woodson vs Toomer - I'm loving our chances" (rocco, 2008). All of these posts and others like them indicate how some of the posters used weather as a means to contextualize and speculate on other facets of the game.

These posts and others like them indicate that the online community was active in constructing their own narratives and meanings behind the theme of weather. By referencing past games, discussing potential match-up and strategic issues, and debating to what extent the weather would be a factor, the fans introduced new ingredients to complement the televised broadcast.

Super Bowl

FOX Broadcast: Economic Imperatives and the Framing of a Broadcast

Not surprisingly, FOX, the host network of the Super Bowl, gave much more attention to the Super Bowl than CBS. The theme was introduced at the beginning of the broadcast, but not elaborated until the end. It is still important to note that this theme existed because it was used throughout to contextualize this game.

One commentator announced at the beginning of the game that it has been "32 years since an NFC wild card team has made it to the Super Bowl" and that the winner of this game would "play the 18 and 0 Patriots in Super Bowl 42 in Glendale, Arizona." This relatively short comment gave the game more meaning and significance than if it were just any other regular season contest. Mentions of the Super Bowl were scattered throughout the first half and given special attention during the halftime report. After the Giants won the game in overtime, the

broadcast closed with several comments centering on how the team would be traveling to Arizona to face the New England Patriots in the biggest game of the year.

Although FOX chose to make the Super Bowl a recurring theme throughout the game, the posters on the CBS and ESPN message boards were not so eager to include it. Rather, they appeared to be more interested in the other themes surrounding the game. This is not to say that the online community was not interested in the Super Bowl, but that disparities in convention and motivation were the reason for the theme appearing prominently on the broadcast and not the message boards. Both fans of New York and Green Bay appeared to be most concerned with the most current game, as mentions of future games were conventionally met with warnings of not "looking past and given Sunday." Once the game had concluded, the Green Bay Packers fans were obviously not as interested in discussing the Super Bowl as the New York Giants fans. By the time the Giants fans did allow themselves to speculate on the Super Bowl, their game against the Packers had well been concluded so that no comments regarding the Super Bowl existed under the context of the NFC Championship game. On the other hand, FOX's motivations and conventions were to contextualize the NFC game in terms of how it led to the "biggest game of the year." As such, the disparity in conventions and motivations were what led one platform to engage this theme while the other only addressed it well after the NFC Championship game was over.

Referees/Penalties

CBS and ESPN Message Boards: Posters Revealing a Culture of Debate, Criticism, and Attachment

It is no revelation that sports fans like to discuss how referees use penalties to conspire against their favorite team. However, the online fans used the theme of "referees/penalties" to

create a unique narrative that was not present in the televised broadcast. Both New York Giant and Green Bay Packers fans argued that officiating was unfair, and as a result, created their own unique dialogues and debates surrounding this theme.

Most of the comments on referees and penalties came from the New York Giants message boards. Threads titled, "Packers 12 man is refrees," "we are getting screwed," and "Face it Giants fans…This game is scripted" offered several fans' accounts of what they saw as unfair calls going against their team. Under the ESPN New York thread, "NO OFFSIDE CALL LMAO," posters cried, "WHY DONT THEY JUST GIVE THE GAME TO THE PACKERS. THE REFS PROBABLY ARE SO CLOSE THEIR EYES ARE CLOSED SHUT" (whiskyandrye30, 2008) and "…worst refs i have ever seen" (jetsfan87, 2008). In the CBS New York board, a thread titled "League wants Favre v Brady" suggested a conspiracy by the NFL to secure a particular Super Bowl match-up with a post reading, "2 bogus calls lead to the FG for the Pack…Quit trying to screw the squad to set up your precious match-up" (ouback06, 2008). Despite the large number of posts by New York fans claiming that the referees were fixing the game, some Green Bay posters felt the same was true for them.

An ESPN Green Bay thread titled "Packers got hosed" contained comments such as, "On the play where Favre threw the INT, it sure looks like the left end of the Giants lined up offsides" (Alvious, 2008) and "are you kidding me the refs were trying to help the pack? The giants had tons of call go their way…the roughing the passer on eli was total B.S. refs helped the giants big time" (cowboys4eva66, 2008). Taken together, all these comments suggested a great deal of conflict among the online community in establishing this theme.

"Referees/penalties" was an interesting theme because, along with others from the San Diego and New England message boards, was not also presented in the televised presentation of

the game. As a result, the online community demonstrated independence from FOX when creating the narratives surrounding this theme. Beyond demonstrating independence, the posters exhibited their culture of debate, criticism, and personal attachment towards their respective teams.

Media Coverage

CBS and ESPN Message Boards: Setting Standards of Appropriate Sports Broadcasting

The final theme to be discussed, "media coverage," was like "referees/penalties" in that it did not appear on the televised broadcast. Most of the discussions on media coverage centered on three topics: former New York Giants running back turned broadcaster, Tiki Barber who had been accused of turning his back on his former team, poor coverage of the game by television networks, and light-hearted poking fun of the FOX commentators. These three topics under the larger umbrella of "media coverage" revealed the posters' desire to reveal their own standards of how a football game ought to be presented.

The bulk of the posts concerning media coverage dealt with Barber. "in your face Tiki," "Tiki has nothing to say about our comical QB now," and "Happy Tiki isn't a part of this" were all threads that blasted the broadcaster for comments he made as a sports broadcaster that offended the fan base. Referencing Barber in the "in your face Tiki" thread on the CBS New York board, one poster remarked, "All he does is shoot his mouth off and I can't stand him. And I'm not even a Giants fan! I'm so glad you guys are representing the NFC.....especially without TIKI!!!!" (TKOSpikes, 2008). Criticism was not only directed at Tike Barber. Television networks became targets, as well.

The ESPN New York thread, "All 4 guys on Around the Horn[9] picked the Packers," criticized sports broadcasters and television networks as a whole with one poster stating, "What i don't get is how these guys can still 'predict' games with a straight face when they're constantly wrong. I don't get how they could even go as far as to predict the score. A million things could happen in the game, it makes it almost impossible to predict a score" (no1betta96, 2008). Oddly, this post could also work as an indictment of the message board community.

Nonetheless, on the ESPN Green Bay thread, "ESPN Experts," a poster mocked the network with, "ESPN Experts. lol now that is funny" (Favicodin6, 2008). Another thread that emerged in the same forum titled "Joe and Troy" criticized the two FOX commentators (Joe Buck and Troy Aikman) for "doing an excellent job of giving Packers fans excuses" (midwestair, 2008). Also, one poster commented, "I had no horse in the race but every referee call was a great call if it went the Giants way or a bad call if it went the Packers way. And every situation where the Giants had a chance to win they seemed to pull hard in that direction" (ripcord51, 2008). The general tone of the message boards was that the online community did not feel that proper treatment was given to this game by either the television networks or the commentators. However, some posters chose to mock the commentators rather than engage in traditional critique.

A humorous post in the ESPN Green Bay forum under the thread, "FOX crew head wear" offered one poster's assessment of the commentators' wardrobe with, "Howie Long $300 fur lined. Real class…Jimmy Johnson Head band Belichick wanabee…Terry Bradshaw Something he found in his Grandpas closet" (Thirdstoolin, 2008). While perhaps not as serious

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[9] "Around the Horn" is a popular sports-commentary show broadcast weekdays on ESPN. The format consists of four sports writers who give their opinions and analyses on a variety of sports related topics.

as the previous critiques of media coverage, this post demonstrates how posters can subtract from the televised commentators' perceived "authority" by mocking them.

Similar to the media coverage theme in the New England and San Diego message boards, the posts that constructed the media coverage theme for these four boards demonstrated that the online community was active in critiquing and constructing how the production and delivery of the game ought to have been presented. In doing so, the fans in the New York and Green Bay message boards assumed rights to the broadcast, just as if they were producers themselves. In pointing out the flaws in coverage by the television networks, the audience rejected their complete authority and set their own standards of what is appropriate when presenting a football broadcast.

Summary

Several conventions allowed for the creation and development of themes and narratives during both CBS and FOX presentations of the games. The message boards, too, contained their own conventions that allowed for their unique creation and development of themes and narratives. Thus meanings surrounding the games occurred as a result of a collaboration of the two media where the relationship between the television producers and the online community appeared to be dialogic.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

As mentioned in the introduction, Bakhtin's dialogism centers on the processes behind the exchange of ideas and perspectives between two or more parties and the consensus, discrepancy, or disagreement surrounding the resulting meanings. His theory holds that not only does a dialogue emerge between author and reader, but also within the text between "characters" that create meanings in relation to each other. Fiske argues that the "text" of a television program does not emerge until it is "read" by an audience that takes it into their individual conceptual system. While the mere material of the text exists independent of a reader, meanings and interpretations of the text cannot exist until someone situates the material within their own system. For this study, dialogism is used as a starting point – an imperfect characterization of what occurred between the television networks and the online audience, but nonetheless a beginning from which to conduct a more acute analysis. While neither CBS nor FOX addressed the message board posters at any time during the broadcast, both parties set their focus on an external text – a sporting event – and constructed varying meanings behind particular themes and narratives. Informed by certain conventions, through the processes of dialogic addition, elaboration, truncation, and omission, the online community produced variations of themes and narratives that often looked different than the televised presentation. The end result was a process that looked similar to Bakhtin's, but differed in the schematics of where and how meanings emerged.

Television networks follow certain conventions when conducting a football broadcast, affecting how themes and narratives develop. Due to the necessity of maintaining a steady flow, there is little time to elaborate on specific instances that may or may not impact the game. This was evident in the networks' presentations of such themes as in-game strategies and match-ups.

Because there is always some action that warrants description by the commentators, there is little time to elaborate much beyond a description of a particular strategy and how it either succeeded or failed. Match-ups are typically given heavy treatment towards the beginning of the broadcast, but little attention is granted to the theme once the pace of the game begins to quicken.

Individual player characterizations are conventionally granted only to those athletes who have developed celebrity status. Due to conventional standards of professionalism, negative characterizations of players rarely emerge. Thus themes and narratives of heroism, toughness, and bravery become more likely to stand unchallenged by opposing voices wishing to characterize the players as cowardly, weak, or ineffective. Nevertheless, if maintaining seamless flow and professionalism are conventions of the televised broadcast, then vibrant debate and harshness are conventions of the online message boards.

Rules and policies surrounding message boards also exist to set the standards of appropriate discourse. However, because of how broad the rules are, posters develop means to tip toe on the periphery of these policies. The CBS message boards employ a policy of self-policing whereby members of the online community, according to their reputation, are allowed to hand "warnings" to posters that violate the terms of service. Some of these violations include, but are not limited to, offensive language, pornographic images, personal attacks, and commercial advertising. Despite these efforts, because of the tremendous amount of members and posts, several acts that could be deemed "violations" go unnoticed, or, go unwarned because fellow posters simply do not object. Personal attacks and swearing were as central to the CBS message boards as the topic of sports. ESPN contained similar rules and policies on swearing, pornography, and advertising, but did not have the same kind of self-policing system as the CBS

boards. Violations were mostly recorded by ESPN moderators. Thus, two central conventions that guided the discourse on the message boards were vibrant debate and harshness.

These conventions were at least partly responsible for how the posters shaped and developed themes and narratives. Because debate is central to the message board experience, events deemed minor by the commentators during the broadcast were strongly argued over and expanded by the online audience resulting in a more expansive presentation of these themes. The harsh nature of the discourse surrounding these themes between posters and directed towards the individual athletes and networks allowed for more acute, perhaps crude, characterizations of individual players and the presentation of the game by the networks.

All together, the difference in conventions between the televised presentation of the game and the message board presentation allowed for the themes and narratives to be constructed and shaped in different ways. This process of co-construction via differences in conventions can be seen as a dialogic process whereby different offerings of the games' themes and narratives meet to provide a more robust, dynamic presentation. Through processes of dialogic addition, elaboration, truncation, and omission, the online audience entered into a form of conversation with the television networks' producers and commentators resulting in a more elaborate presentation of both games.

The Dialogic Processes

Dialogic Addition

In the case of the AFC broadcast, posters added themes of "next season" and "media coverage." This was the process that most mirrored the broadcast. In creating themes and stories alongside the network, without any apparent external aid, the posters demonstrated that they were capable of performing their own constructions surrounding the game.

"Next season," for example, allowed fans to extend the game's narratives beyond the offerings of the network. Prognostications concerning San Diego's future demonstrated the eagerness of this fan base to create and develop narratives without the direct aid of CBS. The immediacy of new threads concerning the future following the end of the broadcast alludes to this online community's independence from "larger" bodies traditionally charged with charting a program's narrative development. By conducting these speculations, the audience executed their rights to the programming as if they were both partners with the television network and critics charged with filling gaps left by CBS.

"Media coverage" emerged not only as an added theme, but also as a demonstration of how the network maintained little authoritative power concerning the game. Through angry responses to perceived commentator bias and even some poking fun at certain broadcasters, the audience presented their own standards of appropriate sports broadcasting. Though, because nearly every comment addressing media coverage was negative, regardless of the poster's team allegiance, one wonders if, for this audience, appropriate sports broadcasting really means favorable sports broadcasting. Regardless of the dubiousness surrounding the fans' critiques, its mere presence speaks to the audience's ability to construct their own standards. These added themes and resulting narratives complemented the broadcast while allowing the audience to assume roles as critics and co-executors of meaning.

For the FOX broadcast of the NFC game, fans on the CBS and ESPN message boards added themes of "referees/penalties" and "media coverage." "Referees/penalties" emerged out of sports fans' culture of paranoia concerning perceived conspiracies by television networks and the National Football League to arrange for certain match-ups. "Media coverage" was similar to the AFC broadcast in that the critiques and jokes regarding the FOX presentation of the game

revealed an attachment and assumption of co-ownership by the audience towards the game. As detailed above, it also revealed the audience's standards of appropriate sports broadcasting.

"Addition" is a significant and unique process because it allows the audience to participate in the actual creation of stories, themes, and meanings. Whereas audiences have sometimes been conceived as receivers of narrative offerings, occasionally engaging in development or expansion, this particular process reveals that audiences can act alongside those traditional authors, especially when the object of focus is external to both parties. A passionate fan base coupled with programming outside the direct control of television networks combines to form ripe possibilities for this type of dialogic process.

Dialogic Elaboration

As mentioned earlier, because of the necessity to maintain steady flow of the broadcast, producers and commentators tended not to focus as heavily on specific instances within the game as the online audience. Because the online audience did not need to maintain this same sort of flow, certain elements of the broadcast could be expanded by a process of dialogic elaboration whereby the online community privileged certain aspects of the broadcast over others, granting them more significant meaning than the televised presentation. Themes that emerged from the televised presentation were negotiated, elaborated, and then posted back onto the television networks' online forums. Dialogic elaboration was the most prominent process among the four while appearing somewhat similar to another process – omission. In their selective elaboration of particular themes, the audience omitted other elements resulting in a type of analysis whereby some aspects of the broadcast were deemed "less important" than others.

Themes elaborated by the online audience concerning the AFC game included "individual player characterizations" and "in-game strategies." The construction of both the

Phillip Rivers and LaDanian Tomlinson characters entered into hostile territory once the online

audience began debating and co-constructing these athletes. Whereas heroism and bravery were

traits eagerly bestowed upon the two athletes by the broadcast, cockiness and cowardice were the

favorite adjectives among the online community to describe these two players. Conventions of

the televised broadcast tended to prohibit such harsh characterizations of athletes, but the

message board conventions allowed and, in fact, encouraged such characterizations by their

culture of debate and criticism.

Rivers became the focus of some debate during the halftime report when coach-turned-

commentator Bill Cowher suggested he be substituted with backup quarterback, Billy Volek.

The discourse that emerged from Cowher's suggestion never escalated past collegial banter, and

in fact, ended with only high praise for Rivers. On the other side, the online community, in their

use of pejoratives such as "snot-nosed" and "cocky," elaborated on this tension in framing the

Rivers character by introducing harsh assessments of not only his play, but also his character.

Meanwhile, discussions of Tomlinson's injury by the commentators, coupled with camera shots

of him sitting on the sidelines became elaborated by the online community. The star running

back, whose character never came into question during the CBS presentation, soon became

barraged with posters calling him a "baby" and a "punk."

In combination, the thematic treatments by CBS and the online community created

disparate characterizations of both athletes while at the same time provided more expansive

characterizations. Furthermore, the posters' ruthless comments deflated and subverted the

attempts by CBS to construct such heroic and sympathetic portrayals of these players. Thus

through the elaboration of "individual player characterizations," the online community

demonstrated an ability not only to co-construct, but to reject meaning using materials seen and

heard on the broadcast. Despite their ability to subvert and reject these proposed meanings, the online audience still voiced their ideological differences under a limited range – controlled by the network's structuring of the game according to their conventions.

"In-game strategies" were also developed by the online audience through the selective elaboration of the fourth quarter decision by San Diego Coach Norv Turner to punt the ball to the New England Patriots. Whereas the televised broadcast gave broad treatment to the theme of "in-game strategies" by briefly recapping particular strategies and only giving specific attention during the halftime report, the online community selectively elaborated on particular strategies to demonstrate not only their football acumen, but also to establish their position within the message boards as connoisseurs of the sport.

Posters critiquing Norv Turner's decision to punt in the fourth quarter entered into highly technical and speculative territory, revealing their passion regarding this decision. Some told stories of how they were "almost shouting at the screen," while others demonstrating their knowledge of the sport mentioned that, in these sorts of situations, "4 FGs don't cut it .. at some point, you have to go for it! And in the 4th quarter, down by 9, it's 4 down territory..." Some posters' comments regarding this decision were valued higher when a fellow member would expand on a point. Complementary remarks such as, "You are an exceptional fan. Your posts on other threads have been complementary, fact based and fun to read" (boltnut47, 2008) elevated certain posters' comments over others. Whether it was speculation, admonition, or praise for another poster, the online community employed the theme of in-game strategies their unique way, elaborating on specific instances and using the opportunity to establish their football knowledge.

The online community also elaborated on the themes of "individual player characterizations," "match-ups," "in-game strategies," and "weather" for the FOX NFC broadcast. Because of similar conventions surrounding the construction of characters that included harshness and intense debate, Brett Favre was not as easily constructed as the veteran hero of the NFL as on the FOX broadcast. Posters struggled amongst themselves regarding whether he was indeed the type of iconic figurehead presented on the broadcast, or if he was merely an aging impediment to Green Bay's championship goals. There was no resolution within the online community, only posters exchanging heated messages resulting in an unresolved narrative surrounding Favre. While the characterization of Favre was left incomplete without consensus, a latent narrative emerged regarding Favre and Eli Manning.

Manning was also co-constructed and elaborated by the online community, but not in the same way as Favre. Because many of the posters' comments corroborated the characterizations provided by FOX, traits such as heroism and the pushing towards legendary status largely mirrored the broadcast's treatment. However, through their discussions comparing Manning to Favre and post-game analyses of how Manning had made the legendary leap, the audience elaborated on his character beyond what was presented by FOX. Moreover, the posters created the narrative of one emerging legend triumphing over the aging, now ineffective leader of the Green Bay Packers. These two athletes' stories became intertwined as the online community stood eager to pass the staff from Favre to Manning.

Match-ups presented by FOX focused heavily on individual players, Al Harris and Plaxico Burress in particular. Rather than follow the same pattern, the CBS and ESPN message board posters entered into lengthy and highly technical descriptions of how particular match-ups, from player/player to unit/unit, would possibly impact the game. In elaborating the "match-up"

theme this way, posters were able to demonstrate their knowledge of the sport and establish themselves within the community – two important conventions that guided the culture of the message boards.

The dialogic elaboration of "in-game strategies" operated similarly to "match-ups." FOX's convention regarding this theme was to give broad treatment throughout the game, using the theme as a mechanism by which the results of certain plays could be evaluated and judged. The online community, instead, elaborated on particular strategies, such as Green Bay Coach Mike McCarthy's decision not to call a time-out in the fourth quarter. The result was a figurative "handing of the baton" by FOX to the message board posters who took certain elements of the broadcast and expanded them beyond the broadcast by adding more scathing, direct critiques that are typically not heard on a televised football broadcast. Additionally, the posters' contributions of their football knowledge allowed fellow members to engage the material beyond what the broadcast could have done given their time limitations.

Lastly, "weather" operated thematically across both television and online platforms, but was developed by the online audience in such a way to contextualize other themes more so than the broadcast. FOX indeed used weather as a means to frame the game, but the message boards, in their detailed descriptions of individual players, particular strategies, and historical events, provided a richer, more detailed version of the theme.

Dialogic Truncation

The process of truncation occurred only once in this study, but nonetheless was important in the co-construction of meaning between television and message board. "Match-ups," while developed consistently throughout the CBS presentation as a means to describe the teams, players, and how strategies would evolve, did not receive as much exclusive treatment on the

message boards. Posters favored using match-ups as entrée to other themes such as individual player characterizations and also, because of their conventions of hostile banter and debate, used the theme to launch attacks against each other's character and knowledge of the sport.

Truncation could nonetheless be seen as a dialogic process because their use of the theme as an entrée to other discourses indicated a desire to employ it differently than CBS. Posters took highly circuitous routes to trace the theme of match-ups to individual players and posters. This process revealed the tendency of the online community to characterize not only the athletes, but also each other in an attempt to establish rank, despite how irrelevant the new topic was to the original.

Dialogic Omission

The final dialogic process, omission, was seen in both games. "Weather" and "player injuries" were introduced and developed by CBS, but were not included in either the CBS or ESPN message boards. Sports broadcasts conventionally frame games in terms of the elements to describe how other facets of the game may take shape. Injured players, especially the star athletes, garner frequent attention to frame how teams will respond with match-ups and strategies.

Likewise, "Super Bowl" was included heavily during the FOX broadcast (as the host network of the game), but not included on the message boards. Of course, every television network's convention is to promote their programs. This difference in convention and motivation propelled FOX to include the "Super Bowl" theme while the posters remained silent.

While it cannot be said that a dialogue occurred between the networks and the message boards concerning these themes, it can be said that a dialogue occurred as a result of the differing treatments of these themes. Differences in conventions along with differences in motivations

allowed for a difference in depiction of both games. In this case, "weather, "player injuries," and "Super Bowl" were left solely up to the television networks, creating a dialogue where one party introduced and expanded these themes while the others' silence allowed the themes to stand without elaboration or challenge.

These are only a few of the several themes revealed in both the televised broadcast and message boards, but serve to demonstrate the processes by which the online community and the television networks interacted to create meaning. The relationship between the online community and the CBS and FOX producers did not appear to be contentious as some utopians suggest, nor did it appear to be hegemonic, as some dystopians suggest. Rather, it was somewhere in the middle – a dialogic cooperation where the producers offered a set of themes and narratives that the online community either received without response (as in the case of omissions), received adding their own interpretations and manipulations (as in the case of elaborations and truncations), or where the online community added their own themes without the aid of the broadcast.

As these analyses and examples have shown, convergence, as broadly defined and applied as the term is, has ushered in countless ideas and debates concerning audiences, producers, their roles, and their relationships. Scholars, bloggers, and other authors in the utopian and dystopian camps have been debating about issues surrounding this relationship, with utopians largely focusing on its "emancipatory" manifestations and the blurring distinction between audiences and producers while dystopians have largely focused on convergence's exploitative, limiting manifestations and the disproportionate reliance of the "average" consumer on "large, corporate" entities. This project set out to compare the treatment of football games on television networks and online message boards in order to gain insight into the dynamics of the

relationship between the members of the online community and the producers of the programming. The adaptation of Bakhtin's dialogism suggests a middle ground between the two contrasting positions.

The relationship between these online sports fans and the CBS and FOX producers appeared neither fully utopian nor dystopian. Indeed, there were several contentious, scathing comments directed at both CBS and FOX, but this was only one small portion of the larger dynamic at play. The online fans and the producers each attempted to construct meaning behind themes and narratives of an external text while the posters elaborated, truncated, and omitted certain thematic offerings of the networks. These processes revealed that the online audience acted as co-executors of meaning alongside the television producers (an utopian tenet) while using the television network's online features and relying on the network to provide the televisual template on which the dialogic processes took place (a dystopian tenet). However, this adaptation of dialogism did not emerge to cherry pick certain ideas of the utopian and dystopian camp in order to construct a theoretical cobbler. Rather, it posits that while the opposing camps each possess valuable insights into audiences and producers, the relationship and interactions between the two parties are more complex than what many utopians and dystopians offer. In this case, the relationship became manifest through a series of dialogic processes where the construction of meaning occurred at varying points.

A second aim of this project was to contribute to the ever-growing body of literature struggling with how to chart this new media landscape. There have been some similar efforts by scholars wishing to examine how online sports commentary has "[extended] or [departed] from existing forms of representation in media sports" (Sandvoss, 2004), but I found no other studies that directly examine televised sports and the relationship between the online fans and the

producers. Recently, however, several terms have emerged in a broader attempt to characterize the roles of "users" and "producers" in this convergence culture.

One such term, "produsage," attempts to capture this new trend of "the collaborative and continuous building and extending of existing content in pursuit of further improvement" (Bruns, 2007). Outlets such as Wikipedia, YouTube, and Second Life, have been cited as forums in which users also assume roles as producers to such an extent that the distinction between the two roles becomes indeterminable. This term applies specifically to those outlets with near-complete user control. While "produsage" is an interesting term to describe this new phenomenon, it has little applicability to online sports commentary. This audience certainly does possess a great deal of control, bringing their own analyses and external sources to the discourses surrounding the games, but they are not completely free. Ultimately it is the television networks that provide the visual and auditory template on which most of the online commentary is focused, thus setting some limits on what can be expanded. Nonetheless, although dealing with other facets of the convergence environment, these and other recent works contribute to our understandings of this new media age.

As new technologies continue to develop and converge with television, granting audiences more opportunity to interact with content, the opportunities for scholarship and inquiry into the processes behind the resulting phenomena increase dramatically. This project is an initial step in examining issues surrounding this new era of convergence and audience participation.

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