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## Did you watch #TheWalkingDead last night? an examination of television hashtags and Twitter activity

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DID YOU WATCH #THEWALKINGDEAD LAST NIGHT?  
AN EXAMINATION OF TELEVISION HASHTAGS AND TWITTER ACTIVITY

A Thesis

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the  
Louisiana State University and  
Agricultural and Mechanical College  
in partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Master of Mass Communication

in

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by

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B.A., Louisiana State University, 2002

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I dedicate this thesis to my mom and dad, who always offer unconditional support and love. Although I do not know what the future holds beyond graduation, I will continue trying to follow your example of hard work and generosity.

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## ABSTRACT

This study examined on-screen hashtags and Twitter activity associated with four television programs (*The Walking Dead*, *Pretty Little Liars*, *Scandal* and *Hannibal*). Twitter facilitates real time discussions, allowing “water cooler conversations” about television to occur while shows air live. Hashtags organize these conversations around topics of interest. Active viewers will migrate to new media sources, searching for additional content that interests them. The act of complementarity increases their level of media enjoyment. The desire for this additional content dictates the viewer’s behavior. Network producers also promote media convergence, utilizing websites and social media to build word of mouth advertising for their programs. The combination of an abundance of exceptional programs and producer-driven media convergence might be causing viewers to feel a stronger urge to migrate to new media.

A content analysis was conducted on three episodes per program, noting the use of any on-screen hashtags. Next, Twitter activity information was pulled using analytics software Radian6. Various comparisons were made, such as the number of mentions of title-based hashtags versus plot-related hashtags and cable versus network program hashtags. An analysis of hashtag characteristics (such as the hashtag screen location and the length of screen time it received) provided information on how networks are currently utilizing hashtags on-screen, and how audiences are using these hashtags in their Twitter conversations.

Networks are placing a higher value on audience engagement. They are mining online data to improve their understanding of how existing viewers are reacting to their shows. The upcoming Nielsen and Twitter partnership will incorporate engagement in a new television rating. By understanding how viewers use sites like Twitter and Tumblr, networks can fine tune their dialogue with viewers.

## **CHAPTER 1**

### **INTRODUCTION**

The introduction of new technology affects the way people consume media. According to Antony Young, consumers' appetites for information and entertainment grow along with the increase in bandwidth and portable media (Young, 2010). The Pew Research Center for the People and the Press examined trends in news consumption and media sources during 1991 to 2012. Americans are increasingly abandoning print sources (newspapers, magazines, books), and instead consuming the same information using electronic devices (Pew Research Center, 2012). Even the number of personal letters written or received is declining while social networks, email and text messaging rise as the prevailing form of communication.

New technology also affects the way people react to media. Thanks to email, text messaging and social media, television viewers have the power to respond directly and immediately to what they are seeing. CNN has incorporated news reports from their viewers for almost six years. Known as "iReport," one CNN spokesperson said it is "the most developed and active citizen journalism platform of any news organization worldwide" (Silverman, 2012).

Although those that use social networks are seeing more news stories and sharing them on those sites, Twitter is still not thought of as a popular source for news. Twitter is a useful tool for breaking news, but many use the network to discuss topics related to entertainment. Last June, thirty-three percent "of active Twitter users tweeted about TV-related content" (Nielsen website, 2012a, p. 14). Almost twenty-five percent of 18 to 34-year-olds turn to social media to express their opinions about television storylines while watching television (Nielsen website, 2012a). Many programs, regardless of genre, encourage interaction with their viewers by providing Twitter handles and/or hashtags on the screen and sharing viewer responses on the air.

This descriptive study examined several primetime television shows and their engagement with fans through the use of on-screen hashtags. I conducted exploratory research in order to investigate how hashtags are used within television content. Specifically, where are networks placing hashtags? Do viewers incorporate on-screen hashtags into their Twitter discussions, or do they prefer to create their own hashtags? Do viewers use plot-related hashtags more frequently than the hashtags that utilize the title of the television program?

## **Twitter**

Created in 2006, Twitter is a social network that limits users to messages, or “tweets,” consisting of a maximum of 140 characters (CrunchBase, n.d.). Using an Internet connection, users can access Twitter on a computer, or through apps on smartphones or tablet devices. Users can “follow” other people or companies on Twitter, and read the latest stream of tweets. Tweets sometimes include links to photos or videos. Most tweets state what the user is doing, or share a headline and a link to an article. Users can share someone else’s Twitter update by “retweeting” it. Twitter had 517 million accounts, over 141 million of them in the United States, as of July 2012 (Lunden, 2012).

On their website, Twitter describes the network as a place where “you can discover news as it’s happening, learn more about topics that are important to you, and get the inside scoop in real time” (Twitter Help Center, Twitter 101, n.d., para. 6). The website also utilizes an algorithm to produce a custom list of popular, or “trending,” Twitter topics for each user depending on their location and who they follow. Users can view worldwide trending topics, or narrow the list to their country, state or city.

Politicians use Twitter to gather the opinions of potential voters, and networks monitor real-time reactions to debate moderators. According to Drew Olanoff of TechCrunch, Twitter adds “a new dimension of participation, allowing people from all over the world to share their thoughts



and feelings in real-time about something that's really important" (Olanoff, 2012, para. 2). During the 2009 Iranian presidential election, a U.S. State Department official requested a delay of scheduled Twitter maintenance, so that those in Iran could exchange information on the site (Landler & Stelter, 2009). The first U.S. presidential debate in 2012 generated 10.3 million tweets (Olanoff, 2012).

Twitter also acts as a powerful communication tool during emergency situations. After an October 2011 earthquake in Turkey, Google, Twitter and text messaging were all utilized to locate missing persons, share information on supplies needed and to make donations (Turgut, 2011). A popular Twitter hashtag offering spare rooms to those in need quickly progressed into a 24-hour hotline run by the Turkish government (Turgut, 2011). In 2009, the U.S. Geological Survey introduced Twitter Earthquake Detection, or TED (Romero, 2009). Researchers use the social network to examine the size and associated damage of earthquakes, since those in affected areas usually tweet descriptions of the event immediately.

Due to Twitter's portability via their smartphone app, people use the social network to issue warnings about both viruses and campus shootings. After almost half of the 360 participants at a recent journalism conference in British Columbia fell ill due to a highly contagious norovirus, attendees used Twitter to tell others what parts of the conference hotel to avoid (Pratt, 2012). Event organizers tweeted when and where ill participants could receive medical attention and hydration supplies (Pratt, 2012). After a 2011 shooting on the Virginia Tech campus, both the university and their student newspaper tweeted updates on police activity and the status of campus events and security (Gabbatt, 2011).

Advertisers are also embracing Twitter as a useful tool for both online promotions and customer interaction. In 2010, Twitter began offering "promoted" trending topics to advertisers (Lavalley, 2010). Sponsors could purchase a topic in order for it to appear on the list of trending

topics, along with a note of “sponsored” next to the topic. Advertisers can also purchase “promoted tweets” that appear in specific areas, such as the timelines of relevant users or near search results for related searches (Twitter Help Center, Promoted Tweets, n.d.). Companies are beginning to incorporate Twitter handles and hashtags into their television advertisements. Best Buy adopted Twitter as a customer service tool known as their “Twelpforce,” promoting their Twitter handle on-screen during their 2009 Christmas television advertisements (Hansell, 2009). Company employees answered customer questions using the social network.

Twitter facilitates real-time discussion, whether that be about breaking news, live entertainment, or sporting events. Two years after Twitter’s debut, the Beijing Olympics generated 125,000 tweets (Perlroth & Bilton, 2012). The 2012 London Olympics produced 150 million tweets (Perlroth & Bilton, 2012). Both NBC and Twitter are attributing the fact that last year’s Olympics was “the most-watched television event in history” to the power of social media (Perlroth & Bilton, 2012, para. 8).

Twitter routinely attracts television fans who want to share their reactions to live television. Bielby, Harrington, and Bielby (1999) defined television “fans” as those that “participate in a range of activities that extend beyond the private act of viewing and reflects an enhanced emotional involvement with a television narrative” (p. 35). They examined fan clubs in a study of soap opera fan interaction. Bielby et al. described fan clubs as a place where fans could express opinions and exchange views, however they facilitated only limited collective interaction in the 1990s. Due to social media, fans can now connect with other viewers, as well as their favorite fictional characters and actors in real-time. Fans can go online to engage with their favorite programs whether or not the shows are currently airing, both between episodes and between seasons.

Twitter reflects whatever is currently capturing the world's attention. People flock to Twitter to discuss televised political debates, as well as the latest episodes of popular shows. The social network is used to send 400 million tweets on a daily basis (TwitterUK, n.d.). Twitter now acts as a virtual "water cooler," where people gather to exchange opinions and information on stories related to the world of entertainment as well as breaking world news. Hashtags help organize the conversation by topic, whether it be #PresidentialDebate, #BreakingBad or #HurricaneIsaac.

## **Hashtags**

In 2007, Google employee Chris Messina invented the hashtag by tweeting the idea of using a pound sign in conjunction with a word or phrase in order to group people or ideas together (Parker, 2011). Some use it for organizational or identification purposes, but others utilize hashtags in a humorous manner, adding a dose of sarcasm to their tweets (Parker, 2011). Hashtags, sometimes described as a form of "shorthand," are useful when users are trying to stay under 140 characters (Parker, 2011, para. 12). Hashtags create searchable topics within tweets. Users can click on any hashtags that appear in tweets or search Twitter for hashtags in order to find more comments on the same topic.

Hashtags rose in popularity during the 2007 San Diego fires, when Nate Ritter repeatedly used the hashtag #sandiegofire to organize ongoing Twitter conversations during the crisis (Cullum, n.d.; Ritter, 2007). Television show hashtags typically include the program's name and/or the name of the network. Some networks choose to incorporate specific storylines or character names in their on-screen hashtags. Twitter refers to hashtags that start sentences or conversations as "MadLibs" style, such as #WouldYouRather (Twitter Media, n.d.). They encourage users to complete a statement or answer a question.

Why use hashtags in tweets? Huang, Thornton, and Efthimiadis (2010) state that tagging provides a way of filtering and/or promoting tweets. Ames and Naaman (2007) discussed several motivations for users of photo-sharing websites to tag their photographs. Considered a “social/organization” tagging motivation, some photographers tagged their photos so that other users could easily locate these pictures by using the tags (a word or a phrase) to search the site (Ames & Naaman, 2007). The “social/communication” motivation refers to tags that add contextual information (Ames & Naaman, 2007). Current day Twitter conversations often times arise around a “micro-meme” style hashtag, such as #ImSingleBecause (Huang, Thornton, & Efthimiadis, 2010).

Twitter issues several rules for their users in the “Help” section of their website, including a long explanation of what they consider “spam” (Twitter Help Center, Twitter Rules, n.d.). Users are not allowed to include hashtags or trending topics that do not relate to the content of their tweet, as this would be considered spam. In February 2011, fashion designer Kenneth Cole used the hashtag #Cairo in a tweet, which was unrelated to the protests taking place in Egypt at the time (Hayden, 2011). Cole’s tweet read, “Millions are in uproar in #Cairo. Rumor is they heard our new spring collection is now available online at [http://bit.ly/KCairo -KC](http://bit.ly/KCairo-KC)” (Hayden, 2011). Although he later issued an apology and admitted that the tweet was a poor attempt at humor, many criticized Cole. *Advertising Age* referred to the strategy as exhibiting a “lack of tact” (Hayden, 2011, para. 4).

Hashtags are now commonly included on-screen in television programs. Some programs also feature Twitter handles and real-time tweets on-screen. As cable and satellite companies offer more and more viewing choices to viewers, the amount of logos, crawls and graphics (also referred to as “bugs”) has also increased (McClellan & Kerschbaumer, 2001). Previous research conducted by a Lifetime television researcher stated that viewers liked the visuals because they help identify the television channels (McClellan & Kerschbaumer, 2001). Competitive pressure led many networks to start including graphics to promote their other programs. Due to the popularity of

cable news channel on-screen statistics, stock information and news tickers, some television networks now employ people that compile information specifically for their news crawls.

Hashtags act as more than simple on-screen graphics, allowing networks to forge online relationships with their viewers. Both television programs and advertisers are enjoying increased interactivity due to the incorporation of Twitter in their shows and commercials. The first TV advertisement hashtag appeared in a 2011 Super Bowl ad for Audi (Proulx & Shepatin, 2012). Mercedes utilized Twitter to create an interactive television advertisement, which aired during October 2012 episodes of the UK version of *The X Factor* (Williams, 2012). The first ad featured a car chase, and asked viewers to use either the hashtag #hide or #evade (TwitterUK, n.d.). The next ad continued the story based on the more popular hashtag.

ESPN announced their partnership with Twitter in May 2012 (Bergman, 2012a). This marked the first time advertisers could purchase a package deal that would include both promoted trends on Twitter and advertising on ESPN properties. A month later, Twitter aired its first television advertisement, which focused on NASCAR (Lawler, 2012). The ad introduced “hashtag pages” by showing a URL on the screen. This URL (<http://www.twitter.com/#NASCAR>) redirects visitors to search results for the NASCAR hashtag, effectively doing the work for television viewers that may not be familiar with Twitter. Networks are increasing their promotion of television programs on social media sites, and, in turn, these programs are pointing viewers towards sites like Twitter by utilizing on-screen hashtags.

Twitter offers a “Producer’s Guide” for using Twitter-related items on-screen during a television program, stating that “the vast majority of the conversation around the show happens during that initial airing, in real-time” (Twitter Media, n.d., para. 3). Twitter encourages TV networks to incorporate the social network into their programs, noting that they “see a direct and immediate increase in engagement on Twitter—anywhere from two to ten times more Tweets

created while the shows air” (Twitter Media, n.d., para. 8). They believe that television programs should promote an official hashtag at least once between each commercial break, preferably timed with dramatic moments. Twitter also encourages TV personalities to include their Twitter handles on the screen. They also advise show hosts or cast members to live tweet while the program airs. MTV recently revised the title of their program *MADE* to include a hashtag (Tepper, 2012). According to Allegra Tepper of *USA Today*, the new title (*MADE #DreamBigger*) indicates “that social television is becoming an increasingly crucial element of the media landscape” (Tepper, 2012, para. 6).

Networks are now seeking partnerships with Twitter. NBC partnered with Twitter for the 2012 summer Olympics in London. When the network decided to time-delay most events for a primetime audience, viewers used the hashtag #NBCFail to complain about the lack of events aired on live TV (Perlroth & Bilton, 2012). NBC and Twitter claim that #NBCFail appeared in less than 0.5 percent of all London Olympics tweets, and note that the online conversations only drove more people to watch the sporting events during primetime.

Viewers chose the ending of the 100<sup>th</sup> episode of USA Network’s *Psych* by using one of five hashtags (Kondolojy, 2013). In the fall of 2012, NBC’s *The Voice* let viewers tweet their votes for which song they wanted to see performed at the end of the program (McCann, n.d.). Allison McCann, writer for the website BuzzFeed, noted the significance of letting a small percentage of the television audience (those active on Twitter) determine what the rest of the viewers (over 9 million for that particular episode) will see (McCann, n.d.). McCann stated that the free advertising for *The Voice* on Twitter is more valuable than the results of any viewer votes. Unlike the poll on *The Voice*, *Big Brother* incorporated Twitter voting that influenced the outcome of the competition (Bergman, 2012b). Viewers cast 64,000 votes, deciding whether to reward or punish a houseguest.

Due to the popularity of social networks, television networks are increasingly turning to social media to promote their programs. Networks are looking to increase audience engagement and viewer interaction by holding online contests, providing exclusive sneak peeks of upcoming content and incorporating Twitter hashtags on-screen. This study aims to explore the variety of ways that networks are using on-screen hashtags. Upon examination of all the characteristics and options for utilizing hashtags, could some ways of using on-screen hashtags be considered more successful?

### **Television and Social Media**

Networks turn to social media to measure the popularity of their programs, because word of mouth travels much faster due to social networks. According to Proulx and Shepatin (2012), “the more people that engage on TV’s backchannel, the higher the chances others online will discover and tune in, out of curiosity,” to the shows surrounded by the most buzz (p.127). Chief executive of BET Debra Lee told *The New York Times* that she checks Twitter’s list of trending topics for anything related to the network (Stelter, 2011a). ABC entertainment president Paul Lee values Twitter’s ability to measure audience response to ABC programs, getting “feedback before, during and after launch” (Furlong, 2012, para. 3). Proulx and Shepatin (2012) refer to social media as “a giant unfiltered focus group” (p. 30).

Before the dawn of social media, videocassette recorders (VCRs) and digital video recorders (DVRs) changed the way viewers watch and discuss television. VCRs allowed audiences to watch recorded programs whenever they wished, fast-forwarding through advertisements. Henry Jenkins (2006) attributes the dawn of season-long story arcs in the 1990s to the widespread adoption of VCRs and Internet connections. According to Jenkins, network television executives resisted multi-episode narratives in the 1970s and 1980s, doubting audiences would recall plot details from week to week.

Most American television viewers discontinued their use of VCRs in favor of DVRs, which they can usually rent from their cable television provider. Nielsen estimates that 44% of American households that own a TV also use a digital video recorder (Flint, 2012). The TiVo brand digital video recorder premiered in 1999 (TiVo website, n.d.). Viewers using DVRs could pause and rewind live TV even if they are not recording a program. Both VCRs and DVRs allowed viewers to “time shift” their television viewing, therefore delaying their “water cooler discussion” of favorite programs with friends and coworkers. Due to new features like Internet scheduling of recordings, DVRs provided viewers with a method of exerting even greater control over their television consumption.

According to 2012 statistics from Nielsen, 289 million Americans own a television, and they spend an average 144 hours and 54 minutes viewing television each month (Perez, 2013). Nielsen also estimates that 50.3 million U.S. households own a digital video recorder (Flint, 2012). When compared with 2006, the 2011 American television audience watched 4% less live TV; however, they watched more television in general (McDonough, Dreas, & Kennedy, 2012). Although live television viewing may be on the decline, Americans are only viewing less than 12 hours of time-shifted TV each month (Perez, 2013). Due to the popularity of digital video recorders, TV audiences now hold the ability to create their own viewing schedules.

Viewers watch almost half of the advertisements while using a DVR, according to Nielsen senior vice president Pat McDonough (Flint, 2012). Proulx and Shepatin (2012) agree, stating that DVR households watch more primetime TV than households with no DVR, and they are not fast-forwarding through as many commercials as once believed. Still, some advertisers are choosing to fight chronic DVR fast-forwarders by creating innovative ads that resemble the shows they are sponsoring, sometimes featuring actors from the program. Viewers typically halt fast forwarding through commercial breaks when they see a familiar actor on the screen. Thinking the show is



returning from a commercial break, viewers press play. By incorporating actors (or better yet, characters) from the show, advertisers may accidentally gain viewers for their commercial spots. Some networks are choosing to alter the number and length of commercial breaks in the hopes that DVR viewers will find fast-forwarding too bothersome (Flint, 2012). Also, several networks recently sued cable companies that tried to offer advertisement elimination features to their customers who use DVRs.

Networks promote their shows on social networks, and refer to social media during live television by incorporating on-screen hashtags. Networks are aiming to draw viewers back to live television by building and promoting the online conversations surrounding their programs. Advertisers benefit when viewers tune in to live television, since that audience cannot skip commercial breaks and instead must watch every ad.

Although almost half of all American households own a DVR, a recent *TV Guide* survey revealed that some viewers are opting to tune into live television to avoid exposure to spoilers on social media sites, with 27% of respondents increasing their live TV consumption due to online spoilers (Carr, 2012; TV Guide News, 2012). According to Tina Fey, “The one thing that does seem to matter to people are things that are events—like the live results show of *The Voice*” (Gonzalez, 2012, para. 14). As a former *Saturday Night Live* writer, Fey has experience working on live television programs. She believes that television viewers still want “that communal experience” (Gonzalez, 2012, para. 14).

Exciting programs are more fun to watch with friends, chatting and sharing opinions immediately. During the “cathection” phase of Carter’s (1960) model of active television viewing, “viewers react on an emotional level to what they are seeing” (as cited in Adams, 2000, p. 79). Perhaps emotional reactions direct viewers online to discuss what they are seeing and feeling. If a program invokes strong emotions in viewers, they may actively seek out the opinions of both

friends and strangers in order to discuss what they just witnessed, and to further explore the emotions related to the program.

The television industry is currently using social media as a tool to engage viewers, drive online conversations about programs, ignite word of mouth advertising and attract viewers back to live TV. New mobile apps allow viewers to “check in” to TV programs, and let everyone in their social network know what they are watching. Industry executives consider Twitter a valuable tool. By observing real-time conversations between television viewers, TV producers can collect immediate feedback on their programs.

*Social TV* authors Proulx and Shepatin (2012) define social TV as simply “the convergence of television and social media” (p. ix). They argue that television has always been a social activity. Modern technology simply provides viewers with new avenues to meet fellow television fans and new online locations to hold conversations pertaining to television. Viewers want to discuss shows that resonate with them, and social media amplifies their conversations (Proulx & Shepatin, 2012). Do on-screen hashtags increase these discussions?

Due to the popularity of social networks, television networks are increasingly turning to social media to promote their programs. Networks are looking to increase audience engagement and viewer interaction by holding online contests, providing exclusive sneak peeks of upcoming content and incorporating Twitter hashtags on-screen. This study aims to explore the variety of ways that networks are using on-screen hashtags. Upon examination of all the characteristics and options for utilizing hashtags, could some ways of using on-screen hashtags be considered more successful?

## **CHAPTER 2**

### **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

Proulx and Shepatin (2012) compare Twitter conversations to an electrocardiogram, capable of monitoring television's heartbeat. An increasing number of viewers are tuning into live television with tablets and smartphones in hand. As more programs incorporate social media into both their promotional campaigns and live broadcasts, viewers welcome multiple sources of information and avenues for discussion. The appearance of Twitter hashtags on television is driving an increase in conversations during live TV, as well as a push to tune into live TV due to the fear of missing out. My interest in social TV and the possible motivations behind television viewers engaging in Twitter discussions led me to conduct exploratory research of fan engagement and hashtag usage within television programs. The popularity of specific styles of hashtags may be better understood through the examination of complementarity, engagement and co-creation.

#### **Complementarity**

Displacement theorists believe that all the various media sources compete for shares of audience and revenue, knowing that consumers have a finite amount of time to devote to media consumption (Dutta-Bergman, 2004a). In the mid-1990s, many communication researchers examined how the rising popularity of the Internet was affecting average American media use. Some believed that consumers may devote a limited amount of time to mass media on a daily basis, and wondered if time devoted to Internet usage would cut into the time they typically spend with radio, television and newspapers (Bromley, & Bowles, 1995). Bromley and Bowles (1995) believed "that early adopters of interactive computer networks are avid information seekers and thus more likely to reduce media use for entertainment than for news purposes" (p. 22).

Ahlers and Hessen (2005) explored various sources suggesting that consumers are not replacing print and television with new media, but instead using new media to complement their

existing traditional media use. In fact, according to Jenkins (2003), “computer owners consume on average significantly more television, movies, CDs, and related media than the general population” (para. 4). Except for the classified advertising migration to the online environment, television and newspaper advertising revenues remain strong (Ahlers & Hessen, 2005). Enoch and Johnson (2010) agree, stating that advanced technology and increased connectedness has provided consumers with “new markets of time” (p. 134). According to research conducted for the Online Publishers Association, 70 percent of participants described traditional and new media as complementary (as cited in Ahlers & Hessen, 2005). Over half of the participants described themselves as multichannel users who visit online news sites to find more information on stories covered by traditional media (Ahlers & Hessen, 2005).

Dutta-Bergman (2004a) explored media complementarity in several different studies, and defined it as “a congruence between media types within content areas” (p. 43). Disagreeing with displacement theory, Dutta-Bergman (2004a) believes that users of one medium will move to another medium in their search for more information on a specific topic of interest. According to Dutta-Bergman (2004a), a consumer’s interest in a specific area influences their media choices. A fan of the HBO television program *Game of Thrones* might purchase the show on DVD, buy any magazines that feature the program, read the book series, listen to the original score and download podcasts that feature in-depth discussions about the plot. Their love of *Game of Thrones* leads to a highly involved search of relevant media for more information on the program (see Figure 2.1).

Different forms of media offer different gratification opportunities. “The information received from one outlet is perhaps enriched by additional information received from other outlets” (Dutta-Bergman, 2004a, p. 49). Although a television program and Twitter may compete for the viewer’s attention, they may both lead to an increase in enjoyment by serving different needs.



Figure 2.1: Complementarity

Dutta-Bergman (2004a) would describe this as a state of complementarity. On-screen hashtags hold the potential to benefit both networks and viewers. Networks use on-screen hashtags in an attempt to persuade viewers to discuss their shows on social media. According to complementarity, viewers may increase their level of media enjoyment by shifting their attention from television to social media. By sharing their opinion of the program and debating storylines on Twitter, viewers may experience increased enjoyment.

Complementarity can be applied to a variety of areas, as seen in Dutta-Bergman's (2004b) study of interpersonal communication after the terrorist attacks of September 11. Participant responses suggest that both new and traditional media forms can be used to satisfy "specific communicative functions," in this case social support after the terrorist attacks in 2001 (Dutta-Bergman, 2004b, p. 670). Dutta-Bergman (2004a) observed complementarity in action by analyzing

data from a national Pew Research Center telephone survey, noting the interest in both new and traditional media in areas such as politics, entertainment, science, sports and finance.

Complementarity occurs when an individual is loyal to specific content, not a specific medium (Dutta-Bergman, 2004a). In this case, they will seek out various media in their search for the specific content, due to their “enduring involvement in one particular content area” (Dutta-Bergman, 2004a, p. 48).

Dutta-Bergman (2004b) challenges McLuhan’s (1964) idea of placing importance on the medium. McLuhan saw more importance in the influence of new technology, compared to message content (Baran & Davis, 2012). Although social media is in its infancy, it is easy to observe its impact on communication. Dutta-Bergman (2004b) states that McLuhan’s research highlights loyalty to specific functions that a variety of media provides, and believes that these functions drive the consumption of specific types of media.

Drawing upon uses and gratifications theory, Dutta-Bergman (2006) explains channel complementarity by stating that an active audience will seek out and consume media that serve the functions they consider most important. Active television audience members want to participate in discussions about their favorite TV programs. These viewers will use whatever technology is available to them to facilitate these discussions. Before technology like text messaging and Twitter, viewers used the resources available to them to hold real-time conversations while programs aired. For instance, television viewers could call one another to discuss shows while they aired live. “Technology serves as a facilitator, as an infrastructural tool that gets used by actively engaged individuals” (Dutta-Bergman, 2006, p. 482).

Similar to Dutta-Bergman’s concept of complementarity, Shade, Kornfield, and Oliver (2012) believe that active audience members migrate to new media sources in order to increase their level of media enjoyment. Their research showed that audience members migrate because

they are searching for additional entertainment, escape, enlightenment, or content-specific exposure. Shade et al. (2012) also observed a link between media migration and viewers who tuned into television shows “for reasons tied to social interaction” (p. 15). Again, social media is one migration option for television viewers that are seeking fellow fans or more content related to their favorite programs.

Jenkins’ (2013) describes the way television fans “translate the reception process into social interaction with other fans” by viewing a program (oftentimes as a group), then sharing and “debating meanings” (p. 278). This description can be applied to Twitter conversations taking place during live TV. Social media and advanced connectivity changed the way people want to discuss television. Nielsen recently referred to Twitter as “the preeminent source of real-time television engagement data” (Nielsen website, 2012b, para. 2). Instead of waiting to participate in “water cooler discussions” of hit television shows with coworkers a day after a show airs, viewers are now joining in online conversations as a show airs (Graham, 2012). CW Network executive vice president Rick Haskins notes that viewers are most active on Twitter during the most dramatic moments in a program (Graham, 2012).

Why would television networks want to encourage complementarity? Why push viewers away from the television screen? Jenkins (2003, 2006) believes that younger consumers enjoy connecting narrative puzzle pieces scattered amongst various sources, and states that the availability of new content and experiences through multiple media outlets can increase consumption and consumer loyalty. Cooper and Tang’s (2009) study found that Internet use both predicted exposure to television and positively related to exposure to television. They believe that viewers are increasingly thinking of television and the Internet as an “and/because decision” (as opposed to an “either/or decision”), implying “that viewers/users are likely to use both the Internet

*and television because they will function in both different and complementary ways” (Cooper & Tang, 2009, p. 413).*

Complementarity has grown from the pre-recorder (both VCR and DVR) days of “water cooler discussions” with coworkers, to websites, podcasts and social media. The widespread adoption of the Internet allows consumers to share user-generated content with a large audience, such as fan videos and fan fiction, on fan-run websites and social media networks. Producers are also utilizing the Internet in order to promote television shows to new audiences and encourage the consumption of additional content related to popular media.

According to Jenkins (2006), media convergence is both a “top-down” and “bottom-up” process, where both corporations and consumers play a role (p. 18). A consumer’s particular interests can lead to complementarity by influencing their media choices as they search through a variety of media sources. The consumer’s desire for additional media related to their interests dictates their behavior. Television programs utilize websites and social media in order to build a relationship with viewers. Networks are now turning to bloggers and fan sites in order to build word of mouth advertising. Producers are using all available tools (on-screen hashtags, social media, websites, online games, podcasts, print advertising) to promote their programs, push additional content to viewers, “expand revenue opportunities, broaden markets, and reinforce viewer commitments” (Jenkins, 2006, p. 18). Viewers are using some of the same tools in order to increase their media consumption enjoyment and connect with people that share their interests.

### **Television Promotion**

Television networks utilize every resource available to promote their programs to potential viewers. Current advertising efforts go beyond the usual on-air commercial promotions and print advertisements, and attempt to connect with viewers in a meaningful way using digital marketing. Networks are creating blogs for fictional characters, podcasts, promoting contests and posting free



episodes on iTunes. In 2006, Oxygen agreed to mention MySpace on their reality series *The Janice Dickinson Modeling Agency* in exchange for banner ads on the social network (Becker, 2006). That same year, USA Network offered free “watch-along” podcasts to fans of their series *The 4400*, featuring commentary by *4400* producers (Becker, 2006). Other networks, like Comedy Central, are choosing to post free episodes online before the programs premiere on television (Becker, 2006).

In regards to the promotion of season one of the FX series *American Horror Story*, FX senior vice president of marketing Sally Daws said that the network aimed “to tease and excite viewers with provocative content that made them want to discover and know more” (Edelsburg, 2011, para. 6). Season one focused on the Harmons, a family living in a haunted house. Premiering on October 5, 2011, the series introduced new ghosts in each episode, unveiling prior events taking place in the house (Internet Movie Database, n.d.). Due to a short amount of time between the series being picked up and the television premiere, FX was left with only three months to build a large audience. The network created three separate digital campaigns for the show, all of which targeted bloggers, horror magazine *Fangoria* and various horror sites (i.e. Bloody Disgusting, Camp Blood, Shock Till You Drop and FearNet).

The “Family Portraits” campaign featured a website that resembled the Harmon house, and videos that introduced characters from the show (*American Horror Story* wiki: Family Portrait, n.d.). Horror websites promoted the “House Calls” campaign, and encouraged horror fans to sign up for an in-home visit from the show. “Rubber Man,” a character from season one, surprised those chosen (GMR: *American Horror Story* House Calls, n.d.). Cameras caught their startled reactions on videos, which FX then posted on YouTube and other *American Horror Story* social media sites. Although the series had not yet aired, FX introduced potential viewers to the “Rubber Man” character through posters and print advertisements. By carrying certain characters and images throughout multiple campaigns, FX created recognizable elements that viewers would quickly associate with the series.

Finally, FX launched the third campaign by mailing Harmon house artifacts to journalists, bloggers and horror fans. These artifacts contained clues for the website “You’re Going to Die in There.” By asking their readers for help with the online puzzles, horror sites and blogs further promoted the show for FX (Campfire website, n.d.).

All of the campaigns had, according to Daws, “dynamic social hooks,” promoting both the *American Horror Story* Facebook page and Twitter hashtag #AHSFX (Edelsburg, 2011, para. 7). Daws noted that FX purposefully chose a hashtag that included the network name in order to form an association between FX and the show. They encouraged horror fans and potential viewers to talk about their experiences on social networks. The network also provided exclusive content on the show’s Facebook page in the hopes that fans would share it with friends (Edelsburg, 2011). FX aimed to encourage complementarity, hoping potential viewers would feel motivated to visit a variety of online locations (social networks, horror fan websites) for more information on this new program, and want to spread the word amongst their friends.

The network’s strong focus on social media probably contributed to the program’s success. The premiere episode of *American Horror Story* drew 3.2 million viewers (Ng, 2011), becoming the highest-rated FX premiere in both the adult 18-49 and the 18-34 demos (Andreeva, 2011). The premiere episode and same night encore airings attracted a total of 5 million viewers (Ng, 2011).

To launch their series *Game of Thrones*, HBO also utilized creative social media strategies. The program is based on a series of books containing a vast array of characters and locations. Campfire, a New York City agency known for engaging audiences through their use of immersive storytelling, created a campaign based on the five senses. They promoted taste, represented by food trucks on the streets of New York and Los Angeles, on Facebook and Twitter (Case studies: *Game of Thrones*, n.d.). The sense of touch, interpreted as a weather app, related each user’s geographic location to various regions of the *Game of Thrones* universe (Case studies: *Game of Thrones*, n.d.).

Fans could explore online environments to experience Westeros sights and sounds, such as a virtual 700-foot wall of ice and a local inn (Case studies: *Game of Thrones*, n.d.). While mingling with locals at the inn, visitors could eavesdrop on conversations and overhear local gossip and scandals (Case studies: *Game of Thrones*, n.d.). Campfire shared the smells of the seven kingdoms by mailing wooden boxes to journalists and bloggers. The boxes contained a map of Westeros and vials of custom-made scents (including leather, pine and parchment) intended to “summon images of rooms stacked with books and scrolls, contracts and deeds—the trappings of a vast medieval bureaucracy” (Bolish, 2012, para. 8). Like the *American Horror Story* campaign, HBO promoted *Game of Thrones* in a manner specifically designed to spark online discussions and word of mouth advertising.

Producers are encouraging complementarity, utilizing social media to promote their programs to potential audiences. Television viewers are embracing complementarity, using social media to dive deeper into their favorite programs. According to Nielsen’s 2011 research on television viewing habits, 45% of tablet owners and 41% of smartphone owners use their devices while watching television on a daily basis (Nielsen blog, 2012). Instead of being thought of as a distraction, the act of gathering information from a mobile device while watching television may enhance the viewer’s enjoyment of their favorite programs. Jenkins (2006) defined media convergence as a “cultural shift” where “consumers are encouraged to seek out new information and make connections among dispersed media content” (p. 3). Jenkins believes that “as fans view media socially, they demand much greater complexity, they want more difficult problems to work through and more pieces of information to explore” (2013, p. xxv).

“Consumers are learning how to use these different media technologies to bring the flow of media more fully under their control and to interact with other consumers” (Jenkins, 2006, p. 18). Fans of the USA Network’s *Covert Affairs* and the CW’s *The Vampire Diaries* directed their questions

about the show's plot towards the program's writers via Twitter (Jannarone, 2012). Writers for both shows eventually supplemented their scripts in late 2011 with a scene or a few extra lines in order to answer popular questions. Both *The Vampire Diaries* and *Glee* producers agree that they approach these kinds of social media comments with caution (Jannarone, 2012). Jenkins (2013) stated that networks often assume that fan opinions do not accurately reflect mass public sentiment. *Covert Affairs* producer Matt Corman sees value in these Twitter comments, and refers to viewers as potential "grass-roots organizers for the show" (Jannarone, 2012, para. 18).

### **Social Media and Social TV**

Social media plays an essential role in television promotion, where networks promote their shows and viewers discuss what they are watching in real time. The viewer conversations that take place during live TV are sometimes referred to as social TV. Social TV is an experience that utilizes multiple forms of technology (such as mobile apps, social media and online content) to increase audience engagement and provide avenues that foster viewer conversations. This engagement increases viewer loyalty and acts as word of mouth advertising for the program. Because many television programs are now heavily promoted through social media, viewers expect these online relationships with networks and shows to continue once a show airs. Paul Lee, entertainment president at ABC, states that social media is "vital to the launch" of a television show (Furlong, 2012, para. 3). The Huffington Post's Maggie Furlong believes that new shows must immediately choose and promote memorable Twitter handles (Furlong, 2012). "The fact that every network now has a social media division says that TV executives realize the power of fan reactions, live conversations and making shows tweet-worthy," observed Furlong (para. 5).

Sites like Facebook and Twitter spread word of mouth at a fast pace. Young (2010) states that word of mouth is more believable than traditional advertising since friends "are seen as more authentic and transparent" (p. 31). According to Proctor & Gamble, people are more likely to assign

value to recommendations provided by friends because they are assumed to be less risky (as cited in Young, 2010, p. 88). Also, the act of providing a recommendation increases that person's loyalty to the product. Lost Remote blogger Natan Edelsburg believes that "when you empower fans to tweet or post to Facebook while a show is on the air, you're telling all your friends to watch it" (Graham, 2012, para. 16). Edelsburg thinks this style of word of mouth advertising could potentially improve ratings (Graham, 2012).

A television show's strong social presence does not always result in high Nielsen ratings. An article on Hypable.com points to the sci-fi program *Supernatural*, which does not perform well, judging by ratings alone (Kelly, 2012). Despite low ratings, the program has a strong social media fan base and has lasted eight seasons. *Survivor* encountered a similar experience, when a large amount of social media activity did not increase ratings (Proulx & Shepatin, 2012). Although host Jeff Probst's live tweeting resulted in increased Twitter conversations (five to seven times more tweets per episode), ratings declined (Proulx & Shepatin, 2012).

Shazam, a music identification app, moved into the world of television in September 2012 (Shazam website, 2012). After last fall's update to the app, Shazam can now identify any television program simply by sampling a few seconds of audio. In addition to this identification, Shazam provides the user with more information on the program creators and cast through to links to the Internet Movie Database (IMDB) and Wikipedia. The app also lists any music featured in that specific episode of the TV program, and provides a link to purchase the songs from iTunes. Shazam is a valuable resource for advertisers, since it holds the ability to connect what viewers are seeing on television with either more information online or the chance to purchase a product. According to Shazam, TV viewers are using the app to purchase \$300 million worth of iTunes and Amazon MP3 content per year (Dredge, 2013). Shazam allows viewers to effortlessly obtain more information on a program, and become more engaged with what they are watching.

Social TV app GetGlue adapted the idea behind popular “check-in” apps like Foursquare for the television industry. Networks frequently partner with GetGlue, offering exclusive media if a certain number of fans “check in” to the show. GetGlue will also mail stickers to users, rewarding them for the required amount of “check-ins.” Similar to Shazam, IntoNow uses audio recognition technology to identify what show a viewer is watching. From there, the viewer can connect with other fans. According to Alex Iskold, CEO and founder of GetGlue, social TV may also benefit advertisers. “Checking in from the couch and unlocking retail coupons is a big deal, and I think that’s going to be a big part of social TV in the future,” Iskold stated (Bazilian, 2011, para. 4). During the fall of 2011, GetGlue users could earn coupons for clothing retailer The Gap by checking into *Entertainment Weekly’s* list of new fall shows (Bazilian, 2011).

Other television programs offer apps to their viewers. Both the *Big Bang Theory* and the *Bones* apps provide a place for fans to socialize and participate in polls (Gleason, 2012). But some have worried about viewer’s attention. If viewers are interacting with an app while watching a television program, is the app detracting from the amount of attention they are devoting to the program and advertisements (McClelland, 2012)? *Grey’s Anatomy* creator Shonda Rhimes quickly discontinued an app designed to provide additional content while watching the show live when the network received negative feedback from *Grey’s* fans (Hare, 2012). They complained that the app’s audio cues distracted them from the on-screen plot; therefore, ABC chose to concentrate on other methods of promotion. David Wertheimer, president of digital media at Fox, admits that the network’s app for their half-hour comedy *The New Girl* focuses on “lightweight material,” such as polls and quotes (Hare, 2012, para. 18). He believes that the second screen should provide “sharable moments” that will not pull viewers out of the narrative world of the TV program (Hare, 2012, para. 19).

A recent report from TwitterUK analyzed various TV show genres and their Twitter activity, and reported that tweets usually peak at the beginning and end of dramas (TwitterUK, n.d.). Rick Mandler, vice-president of digital media at ABC, is unsure if synched second screen experiences are suitable for scripted dramas (Proulx & Shepatin, 2012). He is hesitant to ask viewers, who are “transported into the magical world of that drama” to “let go of a narrative to engage with something that’s in the real-world” (Proulx & Shepatin, 2012, p. 93).

Although some shows did not find success with program-specific apps, many television shows view social media as a useful promotional tool. The ABC Family teen drama *Pretty Little Liars* has been referred to as a “social media phenomenon” (Kondolojy, 2012a, para. 6). An all-day marathon prior to the season three premiere generated over 1.3 million tweets (Kondolojy, 2012a). The season three finale generated over a million tweets, and accounted “for one-third of all Twitter activity in the hour” (Bibel, 2013, para. 10). ABC Family believes that using social media to deliver “bridge” content continues the buzz in between seasons and during breaks, allowing the show to remain appealing to sponsors (Edelsburg, 2012; Proulx & Shepatin, 2012). After the summer 2012 episodes ended in late August, the network launched a series of web shorts to keep fans interested during the two month wait until a special Halloween episode. ABC Family social media sites promoted the web series. A Universal motion picture sponsored a *Pretty Little Liars* app, which promoted the Halloween special (Edelsburg, 2012). The Halloween episode attracted 2.85 million viewers (Ng, 2012), and generated 1.1 million tweets (Dowling, 2012).

Both social TV and social media are new areas of research, constantly evolving each day. An Ericsson consumer insight report revealed several motivations behind social TV participation, including “connecting with others . . . curiosity of opinions of others, seeking additional information,” and “the need to further analyze and discuss” (Ericsson, 2012). Analysts are continually developing new tools in an attempt to measure social media’s impact and reach. Twitter

cofounder Ev Williams mentioned the need for a new Twitter metric (Herrman, n.d.). When trying to measure the distribution of a single tweet, Williams thinks that the number of retweets should be mentioned, along with the number of one's followers. In December 2012, Nielsen and Twitter announced that they are working together on a social TV rating for the fall 2013 television season (Nielsen website, 2012b). This partnership will "deliver a syndicated-standard metric around the reach of the TV conversation on Twitter" (Nielsen website, 2012b, para. 1).

In an article for *Advertising Age*, Simon Dumenco states that "record-breaking" social TV events are becoming repetitive and boring (Dumenco, 2013). He believes that no one can accurately compare social media numbers for various television programs, due to widely varying viewer demographics for a diverse range of show genres (Dumenco, 2013). Dumenco stresses the importance of each show listening to their audience. Organizations that routinely engage with and listen to their customers can more easily identify weaknesses (Paine, 2011). Finally, Dumenco believes that cross-platform offerings, those that hold the ability to engage fans anytime on a multitude of devices, will be considered the most interesting by both consumers and sponsors (Dumenco, 2013).

Perhaps producers should strive for a deeper level of engagement with viewers when developing social media promotional campaigns, instead of focusing solely on breaking records. *Pretty Little Liars* is known for generating a large volume of tweets. By including this program in my exploratory research, I hoped to reveal differences in the way programs incorporate hashtags on-screen.

Audiences have always considered television a social activity. Social media simply amplified their conversations, as evidenced by recent *Pretty Little Liars* episodes that broke Twitter records. Networks are now joining in the conversation, and providing viewers with access to program cast and crew members. Producers use social media to plug upcoming programs and episodes, hoping to



build word of mouth advertising through online social circles. But social media acts as more than just a promotional tool. Networks now utilize social media to build deeper relationships with viewers, and consider it a destination for additional content. It acts as a line of communication to speak with and engage viewers.

## **Engagement**

Paine (2011) believes that engagement should be a priority when organizations begin building relationships with customers. Organizations that focus on engagement and meaningful relationships can produce brand advocates, who spread positive word of mouth about the organization to their friends (Paine, 2011). Networks are turning to social media to increase engagement with fans of television programs. Many shows interact with viewers through Twitter. Actors and members of the creative team from the Fox program *Bones* answer viewer questions submitted through Twitter (Gleason, 2012). Fans of the NBC singing competition *The Voice* can follow the program's celebrity vocal coaches on Twitter, and participate in discussions regarding the show's competitors. When performers enter and exit the wrestling ring, World Wrestling Entertainment provides their Twitter handles on the television screen (Gleason, 2012).

A group of Australian researchers abandoned focus groups, diaries, and eye tracking devices in favor of the help of neuroscientists in order to measure television audience engagement (MEC InAction, 2013). They recruited participants familiar with social TV activities through Twitter. Participants watched *The X-Factor* and were free to use social media during the study. Researchers analyzed the participants' use of both the first and second screens (television and their mobile phones), as well as their neurological reactions to the media consumption taking place. They measured "brain wave activity to detect changes in attentiveness, emotional response, memory coding and engagement" (McClellan, 2013, para. 4). Researchers noted three stages of television consumption: an increase in engagement with the first screen, followed by a decrease in

engagement and a shift to the second screen, and ultimately a return to the first screen that resulted in even higher levels of neurological engagement (on average, nine percent higher than when the participant first tuned into the program). Since participants utilized social media an average of four times during the program, the researchers witnessed this engaged return to television multiple times during the study.

According to Jenkins, Ford, and Green (2013), television viewers no longer arrange their schedules around their favorite programs. Instead of “appointment-based viewing,” the authors of *Spreadable Media* (2013) describe modern television viewing as “engagement-based,” which values “the spread of media texts as these engaged audiences are more likely to recommend, discuss, research, pass along, and even generate new material in response” (p. 116). Executives at ABC Family are mixing the appointment-based and engagement-based models of television viewing, attempting to engage audiences through social media in the hopes that they will consider shows like *Pretty Little Liars* “appointment television.” The network wants to attract viewers to live TV, and also encourage audience discussions. ABC Family vice president of marketing Danielle Mullin stated that *Pretty Little Liars* aims to cultivate “FOMO,” or the “fear of missing out” (Stransky, 2013, p. 33). Both Twitter and ABC Family executives believe that viewers are “missing half the show” if they are not both opting for live broadcasts and discussing the show with friends as it airs (Stransky, 2013; Wells, 2011, para. 6).

Jenkins et al. (2013) advises content creators to meet their audiences where they are “having a conversation to address questions related to the audience’s agenda rather than just what the company wants to say” (p. 299). This is precisely what *Scandal* creator Shonda Rhimes and ABC does each week. The show promotes the hashtag #AskScandal on-screen to attract viewers to Twitter, where they can engage in conversations with *Scandal* cast and crew members. *Scandal* generated approximately 132,000 tweets per episode in January 2013 (Hilton, 2013).

In addition to interacting with program cast and crew through social media, deeply engaged viewers are often motivated to use established characters, storylines and images as the basis for their own creative endeavors. Participatory culture, according to Jenkins (1992), is “the cultural production and social interactions of fan communities” (as cited by Jenkins et al., 2013, p. 2). Television fans share original content for a variety of reasons. Viewers may pair a video clip with their personal commentary on the program, or they might solicit help in further examination of video clips from other fans (Jenkins, Ford, & Green, 2013). Jenkins et al. (2013) identified five qualities of content that is more likely to be shared: (1) “available when and where audiences want it;” (2) “portable” and effortless to share; (3) “easily reusable in a variety of ways;” (4) “relevant to multiple audiences;” and (5) “part of a steady stream of material” (p. 197-198).

Jenkins (2013) refers to fans as “producers and manipulators of meanings” who “transform the experience of watching television into a rich and complex participatory culture” (p. 23). Due to the availability of inexpensive video editing software, mobile apps (such as Vine) and widespread connectivity, fans are consuming television, creating their own reinterpretations of programs, and sharing this new content online. For example, a group of actors reimagined *Game of Thrones* as a high school comedy for their YouTube video series *School of Thrones* (2013). Also, Vine user Jake Holland uploaded a parody of a scene from the March 17 episode of *The Walking Dead* just twenty minutes after the episode aired (Holland, 2013). Vine, a mobile app, allows users to share six second looping videos by posting a URL on social networks, like Twitter. *The Walking Dead* embraced this co-creation by retweeting Holland’s Vine video.

Consumers are now encouraged to contribute to existing content. Banks and Deuze (2009) refer to this as “co-creation,” or “the phenomenon of consumers increasingly participating in the process of making and circulating media content and experiences” (p. 419). Jenkins (2006), however, viewed co-creation as “a system of production where companies representing different

media platforms work together from the conceptualization of a property ensuring greater collaboration and fuller integration of the related media texts” (p. 281). His description of participatory culture mirrors what Banks and Deuze (2009) refer to as co-creation. Participatory culture, according to Jenkins (2006), is one that invites “fans and other consumers . . . to actively participate in the creation and circulation of new content (p. 290). Regardless of the label, perhaps this increased level of viewer participation (and content creation) adds to their enjoyment of television consumption.

Costello and Moore (2007) questioned television fans about their motivation to read and write fan fiction. The research participants stated “that it brought them pleasure and fulfilled cravings for new episodes during periods when the show was out of production” (p. 136). Danny Bilson, vice president of intellectual property development at Electronic Arts, shared his opinion on storytelling and participation with Jenkins (2006): “If there’s something I love, I want it to be bigger than just . . . a one hour a week experience on TV. I want a deepening of the universe. . . . I want to participate in it” (p. 106). Jenkins (2006) states that modern day consumers are “fighting for the right to participate more fully in their culture,” increasing their control over media, and interacting with others that share their interests (p. 18). He describes this new breed of consumer as active, “more socially connected,” and migratory (p.19). According to Jenkins (2006), media companies are still trying to fine tune their relationship with their fans. These companies want fans to purchase and display branded content, but producers approach active fan participation with caution.

In 2008, AMC asked Twitter to suspend the accounts of fans that were tweeting as *Mad Men* characters (Jenkins et al., 2013). The *Mad Men* fan community believed that this fan fiction increased awareness, interest and engagement in the program. After much public debate and the creation of a website supporting the *Mad Men* Twitter fan fiction, network executives eventually changed their minds and Twitter reinstated the accounts. In the spring of 2013, HBO’s *Game of*

*Thrones* retweeted Twitter conversations between two of the show's characters, accounts operated by fans of the program. Perhaps networks are now increasing their support of fan community activities on Twitter.

Although it is now common practice for producers to include hashtags on-screen in television programs, viewers also create their own hashtags for the purpose of discussing the show with other audience members on Twitter. These user-created hashtags sometimes involve abbreviations for program titles (such as #TWD for *The Walking Dead*), or references to the plot or characters (such as #NerdyMona, a character on *Pretty Little Liars*). Last February, *Pretty Little Liars* fans showed their support for the characters Spencer and Wren by using the hashtag #TeamWrencerPLL. *Scandal* viewers created a similar hashtag (#Olitz) to refer to the relationship between the characters Olivia Pope and President Fitzgerald Grant. *Scandal* fans have also created their own plot-based hashtags in the past, including #Gladiators, which refers to show dialogue about a "gladiator in a suit" (Hawkins, n.d.). Fans of the new NBC thriller *Hannibal* have referred to themselves on Twitter as #Fannibals.

Due to the increasing amount of interactive promotional materials aimed at television viewers, Brooker (2001) encouraged researchers to reconsider their idea of engagement. Technology no longer limits TV shows to the television medium; therefore, Brooker notes the blurring of the "end" of shows, since engagement can continue online after the program ends. He references promotional campaigns for the TV programs *Buffy* and *Dawson's Creek*, where viewers could immerse themselves and participate in the lives of the show's fictional characters.

Brooker's study focused on a *Dawson's Creek* website that presented the show's setting, the fictional town of Capeside, as a real place. Producers also created "Dawson's Desktop," which allowed viewers to "log in" to Dawson's computer, read his email and journal, and look through his trash bin (Jenkins, 2006). Producers updated the site daily with bits of information that teased

upcoming storylines (Jenkins, 2006). HBO promoted their series *True Blood* in a similar manner. Written as if vampires are known to exist, the network's "Bloodcopy" blog debated issues of vampire rights and public safety (Patel, 2009).

Brooker (2001) states that *Dawson's Creek* was "marketed within a far wider multimedia context," and online content never presented the characters as fictional (p. 461). In 2006, *Broadcasting & Cable* mentioned the trend of fictional character blogs (Malone, 2006). Networks utilized the blogs as a way of strengthening viewer loyalty and connecting with fans in between airings by providing additional content and interaction with well-known characters.

Characters from both HBO's *True Blood* and Showtime's *Nurse Jackie* have Twitter accounts. Unlike the *True Blood* characters, *Nurse Jackie*'s Dr. Cooper tweeted in several scenes during the show's second season (Stelter, 2010). Showtime posted the in-character tweets in real time. Robert Hayes, senior vice president and general manager for digital media at Showtime, discussed their Twitter use with *The New York Times*. "We want the story to extend beyond the half-hour or hour that it lives on air and become ubiquitous with your life," stated Hayes (Stelter, 2010, para. 5).

The current focus on fan engagement is leading producers to create elaborate backstories (Jenkins, 2013). Producers can increase their audience as well as their revenue by quickly pushing media content out through various channels, according to Jenkins (2006). Transmedia entertainment allows hungry fans to participate, pool their knowledge, problem-solve and crack mysteries (Jenkins, 2013). FX utilized transmedia entertainment when promoting season one of *American Horror Story*, mailing mysterious packages to horror genre fans. Blog posts about these packages, as well as teaser videos and websites, brought potential viewers together online to connect pieces of the program's backstory. Perhaps transmedia storytelling heightens intellectual involvement and emotional intensity, which Jenkins (2013) identifies as the difference between simply watching a television program and becoming a fan.

Jenkins (2006) explained the potential success for transmedia storytelling if producers utilize the strengths of each medium. Viewers enjoy deeper experiences, and transmedia storytelling promotes more media consumption (Jenkins, 2006). “Offering new levels of insight and experience refreshes the franchise and sustains consumer loyalty” (Jenkins, 2006, p. 96). Transmedia entertainment focuses on developing a narrative, backstories and fictional worlds (Jenkins et al., 2013). Transmedia storytelling offers a way of providing bridge content while a program is not airing new episodes. In between seasons, fans are hungry for new content and looking for a way to extend the transportation into their favorite narrative worlds.

## **Transportation**

Green and Brock (2000) conceptualized transportation to describe the way various media, including television, can facilitate passage into a narrative world. They referred to it as “absorption into a story,” and listed three characteristics of the transportation experience (Green & Brock, 2000, p. 701). Transported individuals shift their concentration to the narrative, create vivid mental imagery and experience an emotional response to the narrative world and its characters (Green & Brock, 2000). Transportation utilizes lifelike experiences and transported individuals experience lower urges to counter argue story elements; therefore, transportation holds the power to influence beliefs.

Transportation theory helps to facilitate a better understanding of social TV by exploring how and why people consume media (in this case, television and Twitter). Transportation theory also involves the examination of the conditions that affect enjoyment of media. How do the different elements of social TV increase or decrease enjoyment of television consumption? Twitter accounts for fictional TV program characters allow networks to add detail to a narrative world, while also offering a pathway for television viewers to form a deeper connection with their favorite characters.

Green, Brock, and Kaufman (2004) stated that books, movies and television programs facilitate an “escape” into a narrative by describing another world, new characters and interesting plotlines. The supplemental content that networks provide through social media and/or social TV campaigns extend this feeling of escape. “Bridge content,” such as behind-the-scenes videos, podcasts and new photos, allows fans to escape to their favorite settings and visit familiar characters while programs are in between seasons or episodes. Jenkins (2006) lists the 1999 horror movie *The Blair Witch Project* as the first example of transmedia storytelling. Prior to the film’s release, producers created a website focused on the Blair Witch mythology and aired a “faux” documentary on the SyFy Channel, both of which offered additional information to the fan community and helped sell the legend of the Blair Witch.

The “emotional response” characteristic of transportation may explain why so many viewers flock to social media to discuss programs. Bluefin Labs routinely produces infographics that include what they call a “social TV conversation trendline,” timing Twitter activity to television program content (Seles, 2012). This trendline pinpoints which events or storylines resulted in higher volumes of tweets from fans watching the show.

Green et al. (2004) believed that some individuals use transportation in order to abandon everyday concerns, worries, self-consciousness or problems. They explain how readers or viewers use transportation to imagine possible futures and possible versions of themselves. Consider the horror fans that signed up for the *American Horror Story* “House Calls” campaign. They were so intrigued by the mysterious characters that they volunteered to enter the imaginary (horrific) world. Those chosen experienced horror movie-style frights without the fear of any real harm.

### **Purpose and Research Questions**

Engagement comes in many forms. Highly detailed promotional campaigns, such as the *Game of Thrones* five senses campaign and *American Horror Story*’s various season one campaigns,



transport viewers to imaginary environments. *Scandal's* use of the hashtag #AskScandal encourages weekly online conversations with the cast and crew. Mona Vanderwaal's Twitter account allows *Pretty Little Liars* fans to communicate with a fictional character. *The Walking Dead's* weekly plot-related hashtag serves a dual purpose by encouraging Twitter discussions about that night's broadcast, as well as promoting AMC's talk show *Talking Dead*.

A March 2013 study conducted by Nielsen confirmed a correlation between Twitter volume and television ratings, with a stronger correlation attributed to tweets from 18 to 34-year-olds (Nielsen website, 2013). Many networks are increasing their social media presence in order to promote their shows. Viewers purposefully pair live television viewing with smartphone activities. Will this new style of television promotion, including blogs and tweets written by fictional characters, result in an increase in audience engagement? Is media complementarity (in the form of on-screen hashtags) driving an increase in viewer activity on Twitter?

I conducted exploratory research by observing and noting the use of hashtags during ABC's *Scandal*, ABC Family's *Pretty Little Liars*, AMC's *The Walking Dead* and NBC's *Hannibal*. I designed this descriptive study in such a way as to examine how the four programs attempt to promote Twitter engagement with viewers (through on-screen hashtags). I randomly chose three midseason episodes of each show, excluding season premiere and finale episodes due to an assumed sharp increase in both viewers and social media conversations. After completing the content analysis of each program's use of on-screen hashtags, I pulled information on corresponding Twitter activity using social media analytics software program Radian6.

RQ1: How, when and where are hashtags presented on-screen within these television programs?

Are network program viewers more active on Twitter, compared to cable program viewers? Does the hashtag screen location impact the number of viewer tweets mentioning that hashtag? Are

viewers more likely to notice hashtags that appear on-screen within specific segments of the program (opening scene, before a commercial break, final scene)? Does the amount of time the hashtag remains on-screen affect the number of viewer tweets mentioning that hashtag?

RQ2: How are audiences using hashtags in their Twitter conversations regarding television programs?

Will television audiences favor a specific style of on-screen hashtag? Are viewers more inclined to tweet using creative hashtags that do not include the program title, and instead refer to the program's plotline? Situational advertising, which relies on a precisely timed message directed at a receptive audience, is considered a highly effective form of advertising (Young, 2010). Does that suggest that viewers will tweet more often if the hashtag is timed with and relates to a major storyline event?

Will viewers prefer to use producer-created hashtags more often than user-created hashtags? Producer-created hashtags include those shown on-screen, as well as any other hashtags created by network executives. User-created hashtags include any hashtags created by viewers. Examples include show title abbreviations (#PLL for *Pretty Little Liars*) and viewer references to relationships between program characters (*Scandal's* #Olitz).

## CHAPTER 3 METHODOLOGY

### *Pretty Little Liars, Scandal, The Walking Dead and Hannibal*

Bluefin Labs, a social TV analytics company, called the ABC Family teen drama *Pretty Little Liars* a “transmedia genius” (Seles, 2012). They defined transmedia storytelling as “multiplatform extensions to the primary story world that enhance and add nuance to the narrative” (Seles, 2012, para. 2). Bluefin Labs noted the show’s use of weekly webisodes as a way of introducing a new character and providing more clues surrounding the show’s mystery-based plot. Not only does the *Pretty Little Liars* cast live-tweet during selected episodes, fictional *Pretty Little Liars* character Mona Vanderwaal also live tweets, providing more clues for fans. Mona’s tweets occasionally appear on-screen as the program airs. Bluefin Labs believes that this style of social media promotion allows the storyline to extend beyond the one-hour airing and attracts viewers to future episodes. Warner Brothers (the studio behind *Pretty Little Liars*) attributes the popularity of the program to a plot involving mysterious text messages, dramatic cliffhangers, and fans who spend a vast amount of time online (Stransky, 2013).

The ABC drama *Scandal* utilized the hashtag #WhoShotFitz during the November 29, 2012 episode that involved an assassination attempt on the President of the United States (Kondolojy, 2012b). ABC chose this hashtag in order to provide a way for fans to discuss various plot-related theories (Kondolojy, 2012b). The show routinely utilizes the hashtag #AskScandal on-screen to promote weekly live Twitter conversations with *Scandal* cast and crew members. *Scandal* fans are passionate about the program, creating their own hashtags (#Gladiators) and often times tweeting at series creator Shonda Rhimes. Rhimes currently has 393,576 followers on Twitter.

AMC created *Talking Dead* to “complement the online chatter” surrounding their successful zombie drama, *The Walking Dead* (Stelter, 2011b). The talk show debuted in October 2011, the

same night as the second season premiere of *The Walking Dead*. *Talking Dead* airs immediately after new episodes of *The Walking Dead*, providing fans with “water cooler discussions” led by host Chris Hardwick. Advertisements for *Talking Dead*, which air during new episodes of *The Walking Dead*, present a plot-themed hashtag on a blank screen, along with a voiceover encouraging viewers to tweet. Hardwick later reads several viewer tweets on the talk show. In January 2013, the program expanded from thirty minutes to a full hour. As of June 2013, the official Twitter account for *Pretty Little Liars* (@ABCFpl) has over 1.3 million followers. *Scandal* (@ScandalABC) has over 218,000 followers. *The Walking Dead* (@WalkingDead\_AMC) currently has the most followers (1,508,419).

I searched for one additional network television show, and wanted to avoid an ABC program since I already selected two shows affiliated with ABC. This ruled out the popular ABC programs *Revenge* and *Once Upon a Time*. After considering FOX’s 30-minute comedy *New Girl*, I decided that all programs chosen for this research should be one hour in length. I also considered FOX’s *Glee*, NBC’s *Revolution* and NBC’s *Grimm*, but ultimately chose the new NBC program *Hannibal*. The show follows *The Silence of the Lambs* serial killer Dr. Hannibal Lecter as he works with the FBI on homicide cases.

In addition to hashtags, the phrase “Live Tweeting Now at @NBCHannibal” appears on screen during each new episode. Although common for talk shows and reality programming, I have not noticed many fictional programs using a Twitter handle on-screen. NBC appears to be in the process of adding this call to action to most of their programs. Since I also noted the number of @ mentions (or tweets addressed to the official television program Twitter accounts) during each episode, I thought this might provide an interesting comparison to the other three programs. *Hannibal* (@NBCHannibal), which premiered in April 2013, has 41,364 Twitter followers.

## Procedures

After choosing four television programs (*Scandal*, *Hannibal*, *The Walking Dead* and *Pretty Little Liars*), I watched three mid-season episodes per program and conducted a content analysis of the hashtags used on-screen (see Table 3.1). I purposefully avoided premiere and finale episodes due to an expected increase in both viewers and Twitter conversations about the programs. In order to examine how, when and where networks present hashtags on-screen, I noted details such as the hashtag screen location, the hashtag style, the type of scene that featured a hashtag and the length of time the hashtag remained on-screen.

Table 3.1: List of Programs, Networks, Episode Titles and Airdates

Program	Network	Episode Title	Airdate
<i>Pretty Little Liars</i>	ABC Family	"Hot Water"	2/19/13
		"Will the Circle Be Unbroken?"	3/5/13
		"I'm Your Puppet"	3/12/13
<i>Scandal</i>	ABC	"Boom Goes the Dynamite"	2/21/13
		"Snake in the Garden"	3/28/13
		"Seven Fifty-Two"	4/25/13
<i>The Walking Dead</i>	AMC	"Clear"	3/3/13
		"Arrow on the Doorpost"	3/10/13
		"Prey"	3/17/13
<i>Hannibal</i>	NBC	"Amuse-Bouche"	4/11/13
		"Coquilles"	4/25/13
		"Entrée"	5/2/13

When the program utilized a hashtag on the screen, I recorded the various characteristics related to the hashtag (see Appendices A and B). I noted the length of each hashtag (total number of characters). I categorized the hashtags based on their style: if they included the name of the television program (title-based hashtags, such as #Hannibal) or if they related to the plot (plot-related hashtags, like #WhoIsTheMole from *Scandal*). I noted the hashtag's location on the screen (upper left corner, lower left corner, upper right corner, lower right corner, bottom of screen, full screen, see Figure 3.1), and its scene placement within the program (shown during the opening scene, immediately after a commercial break, sometime in between a pair of commercial breaks,

immediately before a commercial break or during the program's final scene). I noted whether or not the hashtag appeared during a dramatic moment, if the hashtag related to the scene and how many times it appeared on screen. I measured the length of time the hashtag remained on the screen. I expected several of the episodes chosen for this study to utilize more than one hashtag (a hashtag that includes the program's name, and one or more plot-related hashtags).

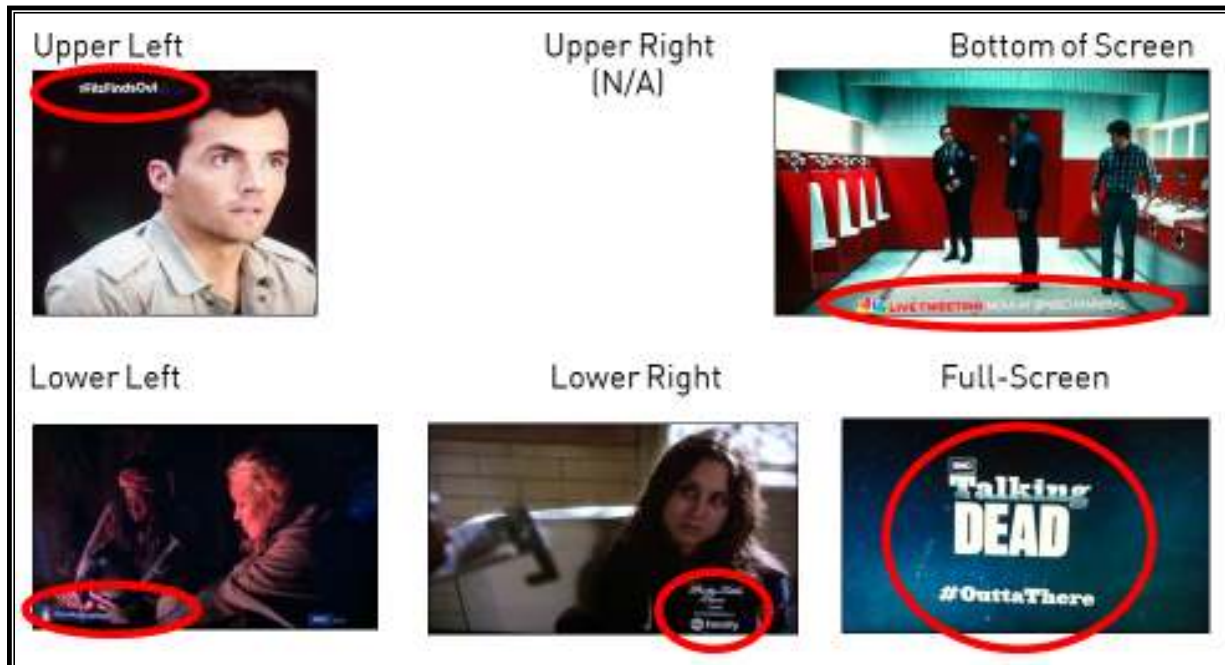


Figure 3.1: Hashtag screen location

Although each of the four programs incorporated their show title into an on-screen hashtag, the programs varied in their choice of hashtags and the number of times they appear on-screen. *The Walking Dead* used a show title hashtag (#TheWalkingDead) and one plot-related hashtag each week. *Scandal* promoted weekly Twitter chats with the cast and crew using their on-screen hashtag (#AskScandal) and an invitation to “Tweet With the Cast.” The show only used one plot-related hashtag in one episode. *Hannibal* did not use plot-related hashtags, but the program attempted to attract viewers to Twitter through the use of a show title hashtag (#Hannibal) and on-screen reminders of “Live Tweeting Now at @NBCHannibal.” *Pretty Little Liars* made use of two plot-

related on-screen hashtags each week. ABC Family specifically timed these hashtags so that their appearance corresponded with the storyline on the screen. The program also repeated their show title hashtag (#PrettyLittleLiars) four to five times during each episode. Thus, *Pretty Little Liars* viewers were typically exposed to six or seven hashtags every week.

In order to investigate how audiences are using hashtags while discussing television programs on Twitter, I also noted the program's channel (network or cable). I was curious to see if cable audiences differed in their use of hashtags when compared to network audiences. I also categorized the hashtags based on their creator (producer vs. user). Producer-created hashtags include those that appeared on-screen, as well as any other hashtags created by the networks and promoted on social media. User-created hashtags refer to those created by the viewers, and mentioned in their Twitter conversations.

I wanted to pair my content analysis with information on how many times viewers utilized these hashtags within a day of each episode airing. Although users can search Twitter by hashtag, the social network does not provide the total number of instances of hashtag use. Several websites (such as Twitonomy, Simply Measured and Twitter Counter) specialize in Twitter analytics, however they also do not provide this information. This led to my decision to use robust social media analytics software Radian6.

Using Radian6, I searched by on-screen hashtag using the date of episode airing, as well as the following day. Radian6 provided the total number of tweets that utilized the hashtag. I also pulled a "word cloud," noting any other hashtags used within these tweets (see Figure 3.2). This allowed me to discover "user-created" hashtags, which did not appear on-screen. I also noted the number of times those off-screen hashtags were used in conjunction with the official program hashtags.

Figure 3.2 provides a sample of my code book, where both #TheWalkingDead and #OuttaThere appeared on-screen during the March 17 episode of *The Walking Dead*. It also shows the Radian6 word cloud for the hashtag #OuttaThere. Note the four hashtags listed at the bottom of the # OuttaThere column. They appeared in the # OuttaThere word cloud. This word cloud revealed the user-created hashtags #Prey and #WalkingDead. Out of the 23,399 tweets that mentioned #OuttaThere, over 1,000 also included the hashtag #Prey. The word cloud also revealed the producer-created hashtag #PreyForAndrea, promoted by AMC earlier that night on social media.

Figure 3.2: Discovering additional hashtags through a Radian6 word cloud

I also searched for some of the most frequently used unofficial program hashtags, which usually incorporated variations of the program title. For instance, *The Walking Dead* uses the official hashtag #TheWalkingDead on-screen; however, viewers routinely use #TWD or



#WalkingDead in their tweets. I considered any hashtags created by the viewers “user-created.” Television fans often included the episode title in the form of a hashtag in their Twitter discussions. Viewers used episode title hashtags in Twitter conversations about all of the programs, except *Pretty Little Liars*. Perhaps *Liars* fans did not require additional hashtags due to this program’s frequent use of on-screen hashtags. I identified five unique episode title user-created hashtags during this study.

Next, I selected the hashtags to be used in this study. I chose both producer-created hashtags and user-created hashtags using the list of hashtags that appeared on-screen within the programs as well as the hashtags revealed in the Radian6 word clouds (see Figure 3.3). I did not utilize every hashtag listed in the word clouds. For example, viewers of all four programs mentioned the mobile television check-in app GetGlue (#GetGlue). Although it is interesting to observe television viewers utilizing this app, I did not consider the hashtag user-created or producer-created.

3/17/2013	#TheWalkingDead	#OuttaThere
name of show	YES	
name of character		
related to plot		YES
total characters	14	10
location	LL	NA
when in show	0 min in	26 min in
placement	opening scene	before break
timed with plot		
screen time	60 sec	5 sec
notes	network watermark in LR	
number of tweets	167,510	23,399
trending?		yes?
WD31713	#oomf (18)	#TheWalkingDead (8674)
Prey	#GetGlue (12,150)	#PreyForAndrea (4426)
	#DeadYourself (1918)	#Prey (1009)
	#Prey (2896)	#WalkingDead (879)
	#TWD (3056)	

**Producer-created**  
created by network,  
appeared on-screen  
or on official social  
media channels

**User-created**  
created by viewers

Figure 3.3: Producer-created hashtags and user-created hashtags within the code book

The search for user-created hashtags also uncovered several non-English language hashtags for *The Walking Dead* and *Hannibal*. After the March 10 episode of *The Walking Dead*, viewers mentioned the hashtag #teamopero in 68 tweets that also featured #TheWalkingDead. First, I misunderstood this as a reference to a relationship between two of the program's characters (#TeamOpero). Television fans will often use the word "team" in conjunction with a combination of two names to signify their support of a relationship between two characters. Upon further investigation, I realized this is a Spanish phrase (#TeAmoPero) which translates as "I love you, but." I did not include foreign language hashtags in my analysis.

To review, producer-created hashtags include those that appear on-screen within television programs, as well as any other hashtags promoted by the networks on social media (see Figure 3.4). AMC promoted the plot-related hashtag #PreyForAndrea on social media before the March 17 episode of *The Walking Dead*, although that hashtag did not appear on-screen. AMC also created hashtags (such as #DeadYourself and #TWDsurvival) to promote a *Walking Dead* app and video game. Dead Yourself allows users to transform photographs of themselves into zombies, and share the final image with friends through social media. Viewers also mentioned #TWDeleted. *The Walking Dead* producers promised to post a photo from a deleted scene if fans retweeted #TWDeleted. *Pretty Little Liars* promoted the hashtag #EWlovesPLL around the time actresses from the program appeared on the cover of *Entertainment Weekly*.

User-created hashtags refer to any hashtags created by the viewers (see Figure 3.5). Viewers used hashtags to abbreviate program titles (#PLL for *Pretty Little Liars*, #TWD for *The Walking Dead*). They also made reference to relationships between fictional characters by combining names (*Scandal*'s #Olitz, #TeamWrencer from *Pretty Little Liars*). Viewers also used hashtags to describe these programs and their fans. *Scandal* viewers called the show #TVcrack. *Hannibal* fans referred to themselves as #Fannibals.

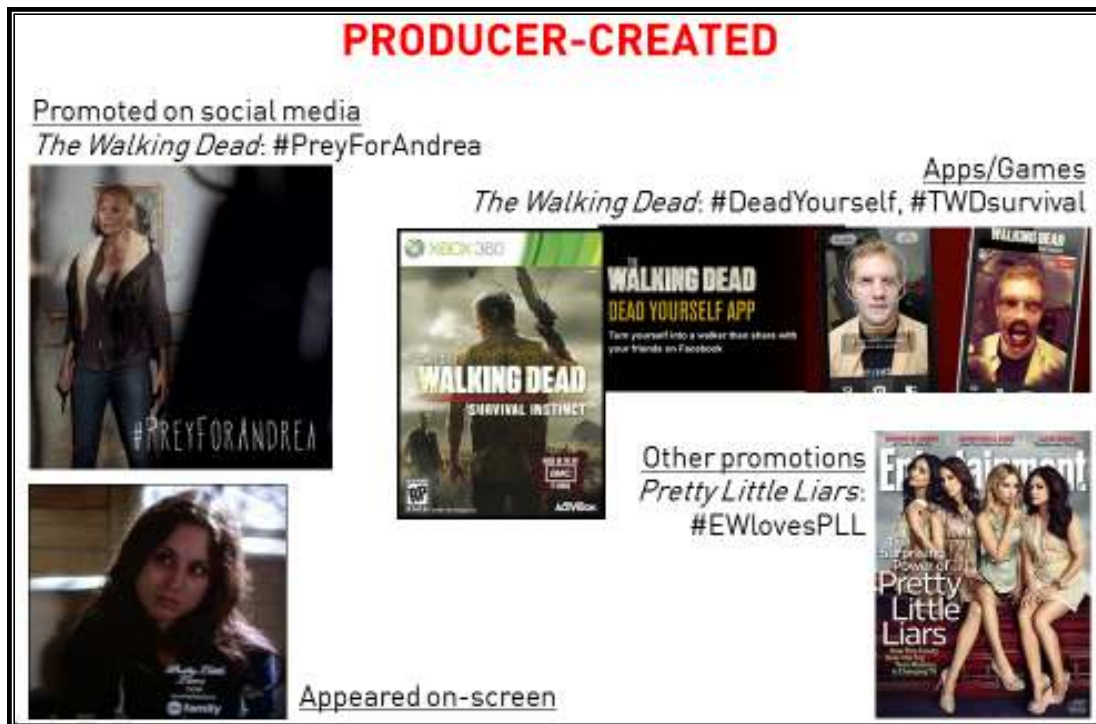


Figure 3.4: Examples of producer-created hashtags

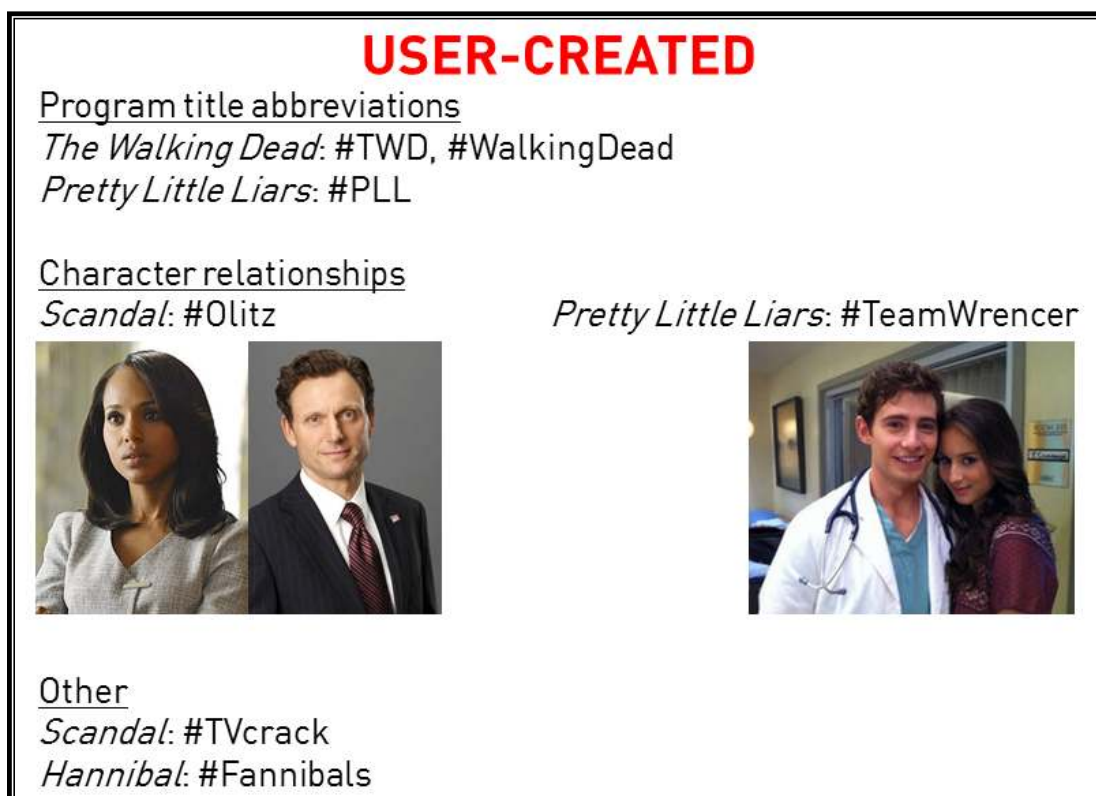


Figure 3.5: Examples of user-created hashtags

Finally, I made various comparisons (show title hashtags vs. plot-related hashtags, screen location) to draw conclusions as to how viewers react to the various ways in which the networks presented these hashtags on-screen. Using statistical software SPSS, I also examined whether or not the hashtag's screen time could predict the volume of tweets that hashtag would produce. In order to learn more about the television audience, I compared cable viewers to network viewers to see if one group would utilize hashtags in their Twitter conversations more often. I also compared the hashtags based on its creator (producer vs. user) in order to see if audiences utilized hashtags promoted by the networks, or if they preferred to create their own hashtags.

## CHAPTER 4

### RESULTS

A content analysis of twelve television episodes and subsequent data collection using social media analytics tool Radian6 produced a list of 93 hashtags. Before running any statistical analyses, I adjusted my dataset to account for the programs that repeat their title-based hashtag several times during each episode. For instance, the hashtag #Hannibal appeared on-screen twice during the April 11 and April 25 episodes of *Hannibal*. Each hashtag remained on-screen for 10 seconds. I adjusted the first instance of this hashtag's appearance to reflect the total amount of time the network promoted this specific hashtag on-screen (20 seconds). Since this case also reflected the total number of times viewers mentioned #Hannibal within the 48-hour window, I omitted the repeat appearance from my dataset.

RQ1: How, when and where are hashtags presented on-screen within these television programs?

In order to examine how networks use hashtags on-screen within their programs, I observed and noted the style of hashtag, the length of the hashtag, the screen location, the type of scene in which it appears and the total amount of screen time the hashtag received. Out of the 40 hashtags that appeared on-screen during the twelve television episodes examined in this study, 75% incorporated the program title in the hashtag ( $n = 30$ ) and 25% referred to a program plotline ( $n = 10$ ). The results of an independent samples t-test showed that the difference between the amount of tweets that mentioned on-screen title-based hashtags ( $M=30,453.67$ ,  $SD=64,768.61$ ) and the amount of tweets that mentioned on-screen plot-related hashtags ( $M=13,026$ ,  $SD=10,247.77$ ) was not significant,  $t(33) = 1.42$ ,  $p > .05$ . As Table 4.1 shows, all four programs make use of a show title hashtag at least once during each episode. *Pretty Little Liars* utilized a show title hashtag more often than the other programs, flashing #PrettyLittleLiars on-screen at least four times each episode.

Table 4.1: Descriptive Statistics of Tweets Per Program

		All Hashtags	On-Screen Hashtags	Producer-Created Hashtags	User-Created Hashtags	Title-Based Hashtags (On-Screen)	Plot-Based Hashtags (On-Screen)
<u>CABLE</u>							
<i>The Walking Dead</i>							
	<i>n</i>	27	6	12	15	3	3
	M	35,880.63	119,641.67	62,503.75	14,582.13	212,685.00	26,598.33
	SD	66,944.10	105,897.58	93,193.90	20,130.47	44,932.99	6,751.70
Avg Length:	M	10.41	11.17	11.33	9.67	14.00	8.33
	SD	4.54	3.25	2.39	5.70	0.00	1.53
<i>Pretty Little Liars</i>							
	<i>n</i>	26	20	21	5	14	6
	M	29,354.54	9,725.75	9,356.81	113,345.00	10,471.79	7,985.00
	SD	60,829.37	17,417.85	17,060.80	103,698.84	20,937.69	2,801.57
Avg Length:	M	13.31	15.20	14.95	6.40	17.00	11.00
	SD	4.97	3.22	3.34	4.98	0.00	3.03
<u>NETWORK</u>							
<i>Scandal</i>							
	<i>n</i>	27	6	6	21	5	1
	M	19,938.44	12,735.00	12,735.00	21,996.57	14,771.00	2555.00
	SD	45,807.37	13,147.96	13,147.96	51,619.55	13,601.34	0.00
Avg Length:	M	8.56	10.33	10.33	8.05	10.00	12.00
	SD	3.22	0.82	0.8	3.47	0.00	0.00
<i>Hannibal</i>							
	<i>n</i>	13	8	8	5	8	--
	M	4,277.00	6,886.88	6,886.88	101.20	6,886.88	--
	SD	5,996.31	6,433.61	6,433.61	114.20	6,433.61	--
Avg Length:	M	9.77	9.13	9.13	10.80	9.13	--
	SD	1.59	1.55	1.55	1.10	1.55	--

Out of the four programs involved in this study, the cable programs *The Walking Dead* and *Pretty Little Liars* attempted to incorporate weekly plotlines into their on-screen hashtags more often than the network programs (see Table 4.1). Although both shows routinely make use of on-screen hashtags that refer to a plotline taking place in the current episode, *Pretty Little Liars* utilized twice as many plot-related hashtags ( $n = 6$ ) as *The Walking Dead* ( $n = 3$ ). Surprisingly, *The Walking Dead* viewers utilized on-screen plot-related hashtags in their Twitter conversations ( $M=26,598.33$ ,  $SD=6,751.7$ ) more often than on-screen plot-related *Pretty Little Liars* hashtags ( $M=7,985$ ,  $SD=2,801.57$ ). The popularity of *The Walking Dead* could have skewed these results. Perhaps *Walking Dead* viewers are simply more vocal on Twitter.

By limiting a title-based hashtag vs. plot-related hashtag comparison to one program (*The Walking Dead*), I avoid the potential confound of program popularity. During each episode of *The Walking Dead*, AMC provides viewers with one on-screen title-based hashtag and one on-screen plot-related hashtag. Which style of hashtag would viewers mention more often in their tweets? The results of an independent samples t-test showed that *Walking Dead* viewers utilized on-screen title-based hashtags in their Twitter conversations ( $M=212,685.00$ ,  $SD=44,932.99$ ) significantly more often than on-screen plot-related hashtags ( $M=26,598.33$ ,  $SD=6,751.70$ ),  $t(4) = 7.09$ ,  $p < .01$ .

After conducting the content analysis of twelve television program episodes, I created a list of six observed locations for on-screen hashtags: the upper left corner, the lower left corner, the upper right corner, the lower right corner, across the entire bottom of the screen, or across the entire screen. As Table 4.2 shows, no hashtags appeared in the upper right corner of the screen. Although the largest number of hashtags appeared in the lower right corner of the screen ( $n = 24$ ,  $M=10,974.25$ ,  $SD=17,187.42$ ), hashtags placed in the lower left corner were mentioned in the most tweets ( $n = 3$ ,  $M=212,685$ ,  $SD=44,932.99$ ).

Table 4.2: Descriptive Statistics of On-screen Hashtag Locations

Screen Location	<i>N</i>	Mean	SD
Upper Left	6	7,985.00	2,801.57
Lower Left	3	212,685.00	44,932.99
Upper Right	--	--	--
Lower Right	24	10,974.25	17,187.42
Bottom of Screen	3	4,057.67	254.98
Full-Screen	4	20,587.50	13,225.38

*Hannibal*, *Scandal* and *Pretty Little Liars* all utilized the lower right corner for their show title-based hashtags. Only *The Walking Dead* used the lower left corner of the screen. This screen location analysis showed that the three *Walking Dead* title-based hashtags (one featured in each episode) were mentioned in more tweets compared to the other screen locations. It is not clear whether the large number of tweets containing the hashtags featured in the lower left corner are a result of the hashtag's screen location or the popularity of the program.

Like *The Walking Dead*, *Scandal* presented their plot-related hashtag as a full-screen graphic. Both *The Walking Dead* and *Pretty Little Liars* used screen locations to differentiate between their title-based hashtags and their plot-related hashtags. *Pretty Little Liars* plot-based hashtags appeared alone in the upper left corner of the screen, and their title-based hashtags were featured with the ABC Family logo in the lower right corner of the screen. Only *Hannibal* utilized the entire bottom of the screen. The phrase "Live Tweeting Now at @NBCHannibal" stretched from the lower left corner to the lower right corner, and appeared once during each episode.

I assigned a code to each on-screen hashtag depending on the segment of the program in which it was featured. The categories were: opening scene/beginning of episode, immediately after a commercial break, sometime in between a pair of commercial breaks, immediately before a commercial break, or during the final scene/end of the episode.



Table 4.3: Frequencies of On-screen Hashtag Scene Placement

Scene Placement	<i>N</i>
Opening Scene/Beginning	9
After Commercial Break	21
Between Pair of Commercial Breaks	5
Before Commercial Break	4
Final Scene/End of Show	1

As Table 4.3 shows, hashtags appeared most often after a commercial break ( $n = 21$ ). Both *Pretty Little Liars* and *Scandal* always used their title-based hashtags (#PrettyLittleLiars, #AskScandal) after commercial breaks. *Hannibal* issued their Twitter invitation to viewers (“Live Tweeting Now at @NBCHannibal”) after a commercial break in two of their three episodes. *Hannibal* and *The Walking Dead* both placed title-based hashtags (#Hannibal, #TheWalkingDead) during each episode’s opening scene. *Pretty Little Liars* also placed a plot-based hashtag at the beginning of their show in two out of three episodes. *Scandal* used a plot-related hashtag at the end of one episode.

Just as each network routinely uses consistent hashtag screen locations from week to week, they are also consistent with the length of time the hashtag remains on the screen. A simple linear regression analysis revealed no significant relationship between the hashtag screen time and the number of tweets mentioning that hashtag, Adjusted  $R^2 = .08$ ,  $F(1, 23) = 3.17$ ,  $p > .05$ , although the results approached statistical significance. A longer screen time does not necessarily lead to a larger number of tweets ( $B = .35$ ,  $p > .05$ ).

Some hashtags appear on-screen for just a few seconds (6 seconds for #AskScandal, 5 seconds for *Walking Dead* plot-related hashtags, 10 seconds for #Hannibal). *Scandal*’s blink-and-you’ll-miss-it plot-related hashtag (#WhoIsTheMole) featured at the end of their March 28 episode remained on screen for just one second. All *Pretty Little Liars* hashtags (both title-based and plot-related) remain on screen for approximately thirty seconds. Perhaps the reason why viewers

mention *The Walking Dead's* show title hashtags (#TheWalkingDead) in such a large volume of tweets ( $M=212,685$ ,  $SD=44,932.99$ ) is due to the fact that those hashtags remain on-screen during each episode's opening scene for a full sixty seconds.

RQ2: How are audiences using hashtags in their Twitter conversations regarding television programs?

In order to better understand how audiences are using television program hashtags, I wanted to see if network viewers differed in their use of hashtags compared to cable viewers. Out of the 93 hashtags examined in this study, 43% appeared in a network television program (either *Scandal* or *Hannibal*,  $n = 40$ ) and 57% appeared in a cable television program (*The Walking Dead* or *Pretty Little Liars*,  $n = 53$ ). Interestingly, the results of an independent samples t-test showed no significant difference between the amount of tweets that mention hashtags (both producer-created and user-created) associated with cable television programs ( $M=32,679.15$ ,  $SD=63,486.63$ ) compared to the amount of tweets that mention hashtags referring to network television programs ( $M=14,848.48$ ,  $SD=38,276.99$ ),  $t(91) = -1.57$ ,  $p > .05$ .

The results begin to approach statistical significance once I limited my comparison to only the hashtags seen on-screen (which are all producer-created). Out of the 40 hashtags that appeared on-screen during the twelve television episodes examined in this study, 35% were associated with a network television program ( $n = 14$ ) and 65% were associated with a cable television program ( $n = 26$ ). The results of an independent samples t-test showed that viewers mentioned on-screen hashtags associated with cable television programs ( $M=35,090.96$ ,  $SD=68,584.71$ ) just as often as on-screen hashtags referring to network television programs ( $M=9,393.21$ ,  $SD=9,889.17$ ),  $t(27) = -1.88$ ,  $p > .05$ .

I also wanted to compare producer-created hashtags to user-created hashtags, in order to see if television audiences mentioned the hashtags promoted by the networks or if they preferred

to create their own hashtags when discussing shows on Twitter. The word clouds pulled from the search for on-screen hashtags revealed other “unofficial” hashtags created by the viewers. Some hashtags featured character names (#Huck, #JackCrawford). The hashtag #Olitz referred to the *Scandal* relationship between the characters Olivia Pope and President Fitzgerald Grant. Viewers created hashtags to refer to their community of fans. *Hannibal* fans began referring to themselves as #Fannibals just a few weeks after the show premiered. *Scandal* viewers mentioned their #ScandalFamily, and referred to the show as #TVcrack.

Network producers created 50.5% ( $n = 47$ ) of the 93 hashtags examined in this study, while viewers created 49.5% of the hashtags ( $n = 46$ ). The results of an independent samples t-test showed no significant difference between the amount of tweets mentioning producer-created hashtags (regardless of an on-screen appearance,  $M=22,937.09$ ,  $SD=52,720.79$ ) and the amount of tweets mentioning user-created hashtags ( $M=27,128.07$ ,  $SD=56,903.77$ ),  $t(91) = -.37$ ,  $p > .05$ .

## Results summary

After conducting a content analysis of twelve television episodes (two cable shows, two network shows, three episodes per program), I used Radian6 to identify the corresponding Twitter conversations utilizing the hashtags seen on-screen. I limited the search for Twitter activity to a 48-hour period (the day of the episode, and the following day). The final data set included 93 hashtags. Network executives utilized on-screen hashtags in an attempt to increase Twitter discussions surrounding the four programs (*Scandal*, *Hannibal*, *Pretty Little Liars* and *The Walking Dead*). In addition to on-screen hashtags, both *Scandal* and *Hannibal* issued an invitation to join the conversation on Twitter (“Tweet with the Cast #AskScandal” and “Live Tweeting Now at @NBCHannibal”). *The Walking Dead* pairs a plot-related hashtag with a promotion for *Talking Dead*, the talk show focused on examining that night’s episode of *The Walking Dead*.

In order to better understand how, when and where networks present these on-screen hashtags, I started with an analysis of the types of hashtags. Television audiences did not prefer one type of hashtag over another. They mentioned the on-screen title-based hashtags in their Twitter conversations just as much as plot-related hashtags. The cable programs utilized plot-related hashtags much more often than the network programs. *Pretty Little Liars* used two plot-related hashtags each episode, but viewers mentioned *The Walking Dead's* plot-related hashtag more often. *Walking Dead* viewers used that show's title-based hashtags significantly more often than the program's plot-related hashtags.

When and where did these programs utilize on-screen hashtags? The most common screen location for on-screen hashtags, the lower right corner, did not produce the most tweets on average. Viewers preferred to mention the hashtags from the lower left corner of the screen. Most hashtags appeared on-screen immediately following a commercial break. The length of time a hashtag remains on-screen did not predict the number of times the hashtag will be used. A program's level of popularity may hold the greatest influence over the number of times a program hashtag will be mentioned, compared to the hashtag's on-screen location, screen time or the hashtag style.

In addition to on-screen hashtags, I also wanted to gather information on the television audience. Cable viewers and network viewers utilized about the same amount of television program hashtags in their tweets. Viewers created roughly half of the 93 hashtags included in this study. The television networks promoted the remaining hashtags. Television audiences did not seem to prefer one over the other, and mentioned producer-created hashtags about as often as viewer-created hashtags.

## **CHAPTER 5**

### **DISCUSSION**

Twitter is a widely used communication tool, a source of entertainment and a new advertising venue. Advertisers are forging new partnerships with Twitter, valuing the added online exposure. Twitter now sells package deals to advertisers, which include both promoted trends on Twitter and advertising through Twitter partners, such as ESPN. Twitter recently announced new partnerships with several television networks, such as The Weather Channel, Fuse, BBC America, A&E, Discovery and Fox (Brown, 2013). Advertisers are also learning to use Twitter to quickly react to current events in order to engage consumers. Oreo became a Twitter trending topic when the company produced an ad during the 2013 Super Bowl, immediately reacting to the game's power outage (Schaeffer, 2013).

Hashtags quickly rose in popularity on Twitter just six years ago. They also spread to other networks, such as Facebook, Instagram and Vine. Twitter is expanding hashtags beyond a simple labeling device. Last February, Twitter entered into a partnership with American Express, which will allow customers to use hashtags to make purchases (Bough, 2013). "Having customers promote brands while buying them is a win-win situation," observed *Forbes* writer B. Bonin Bough (2013, para. 4).

Corporations quickly embraced hashtags, aware of their power as a form of word of mouth advertising. By incorporating hashtags in their promotional campaigns, advertisers hope consumers will mention their products on social networks. Hashtags now appear in print ads, on product packaging, in movie previews and on-screen within television programs. Although this study focuses on the hashtags that appear on TV screens, it contributes to the overall understanding of how and why consumers use hashtags in their conversations.

This study aimed to explore how television networks use hashtags on-screen within TV programs, and how television audiences use hashtags in their Twitter discussions about TV programs. Out of the 93 hashtags analyzed in this study, 43% appeared on-screen within the twelve television episodes examined. The rest were either created by viewers or promoted by producers exclusively on Twitter. Networks are attempting to build relationships with fans through the creative use of hashtags. They utilize comical hashtags to spark conversations, and reward fans for retweeting promotional hashtags. Networks like BET and ABC routinely use Twitter to monitor viewer conversations and the popularity of producer-created hashtags during live TV, when viewers are likely to use on-screen hashtags to discuss what they are watching.

Jenkins (2013) explained how fans often times consider television shows a group activity—an opportunity to socialize with other viewers and discuss the meaning of program plotlines. Complementarity is at play when television audience members watch a program, and then go online in search of more information or to voice their opinion about the show. Viewers create their own hashtags in order to steer the conversation towards the topics that interest them. Networks attempt to control the conversations surrounding their programs by offering on-screen producer-created hashtags. Regardless of whether viewers prefer producer-created hashtags or user-created hashtags, television is pushing them to Twitter and encouraging complementarity-related activities to keep audiences engaged with the worlds they are transported into week after week. The season four premiere of *Pretty Little Liars*, which aired on June 11, attracted 2.97 million viewers and generated almost 1.3 million tweets (Gonzalez, 2013).

How, when and where do television networks present hashtags on-screen within *Pretty Little Liars*, *Scandal*, *The Walking Dead* and *Hannibal*? All four shows utilized hashtags on-screen. AMC paired their *Walking Dead* plot-related hashtag with a narrator, who called attention to the plot point that would be up for discussion later on *Talking Dead*. *Pretty Little Liars* always timed

their plot-related hashtags with the action on the screen, sometimes even incorporating a character's quote into the hashtag. Both *Hannibal* and *Scandal* used on-screen invitations to tweet ("Live Tweeting Now at @NBCHannibal" and "Tweet With the Cast #AskScandal"). Networks are experimenting with their on-screen graphics in order to discover the most successful methods for engaging their viewers and encouraging online conversations. And based on the current study's results, the success of the method may also depend on the strength of the existing relationship viewers already have with characters and the show's fan community.

Producers utilized both title-based and plot-related hashtags on-screen, and viewers did not prefer one hashtag style over the other. They mentioned both title-based hashtags and plot-related hashtags in their Twitter discussions. Television networks provided viewers with three times as many title-based hashtags ( $n = 30$ ), compared to plot-based hashtags ( $n = 10$ ). Perhaps hashtags that include the program title are a more effective promotional tool, since television viewers that are not familiar with a program might consider a title-based hashtag more recognizable. In order to utilize a plot-based hashtag, viewers must possess a high level of knowledge about the program's plotlines, and a higher level of engagement with the show.

Although this study did not include a content analysis of viewer tweets, the "check-in" app GetGlue (identified by their hashtag, #GetGlue) appeared numerous times in tweets related to all four programs. If users choose to post their GetGlue check-ins to Twitter, the tweet usually reads "I'm watching (show title) on #GetGlue." Some viewer tweets may not contain an opinion on a program. Instead, it may simply state what they are watching. Even tweets like these are valuable sources of information. These viewers want to express their interests, and convey their membership within a community of fans. GetGlue users may check-in to the app for the same reason. Check-ins earn stickers, which also communicate their interests to others.

Perhaps plot-related hashtags are an indication of a higher level of viewer interest or fandom. Again, those that tune into a program occasionally might utilize the title-based hashtags. Plot-related hashtags (created by either producers or users) mentioned in Twitter conversations may indicate deeper engagement and a higher level of familiarity with details related to plotlines and characters.

Plot-related hashtags are becoming more common. Although reality programs and advertisements do not contain a conventional “plot,” they are also beginning to incorporate hashtags that relate to the action on the screen. A&E’s reality show *Duck Dynasty* encouraged viewers to “tweet #NapHard now to win prizes,” referencing Uncle’s Si’s love for napping. The Fox reality competition *So You Think You Can Dance* recently began using contextually relevant hashtags, such as quotes from competitors and the judges. A current Kentucky Fried Chicken commercial, advertising their boneless chicken, includes the hashtag #IAteTheBones. Revlon includes the hashtag #CastASpell in their new advertisement for Lash Potion mascara.

*Hannibal* did not utilize any plot-related hashtags. Although the March 28 episode of *Scandal* incorporated a plot-related hashtag (#WhoIsTheMole), ABC showed the hashtag on screen after both the episode and the promotional scenes from the next episode aired. Also, the hashtag remained on-screen for only one second. Perhaps viewers did not stay tuned once the episode concluded, or maybe they missed the hashtag’s quick flash across the screen. Unlike plot-related hashtags used in *The Walking Dead* and *Pretty Little Liars*, the “mole” hashtag referred to a season-long storyline. Viewers mentioned it in 2,555 tweets during this study’s timeframe (the day of the episode airing and the following day). Plot-related hashtags used in *The Walking Dead* and *Pretty Little Liars* always relate to the plot of that week’s episode, and usually reflect the action currently taking place on-screen. Viewers might consider plot-related hashtags that are timed with the action on-screen more relevant and interesting.



Every episode of *The Walking Dead* included a full-screen plot-related hashtag immediately preceding the third commercial break of the evening. While the hashtag appeared on the screen, a narrator encouraged viewers to discuss the show on Twitter. The narrator also reminded viewers that *Talking Dead* would discuss the plot point immediately after *The Walking Dead*. Out of the four programs examined in this study, only AMC experimented with the additional element of a narrator to draw the viewer's attention to the television screen.

The March 17 episode of *The Walking Dead* used the hashtag #OuttaThere. During the ten seconds that this hashtag appeared on-screen, the narrator stated that *Talking Dead* would "discuss Andrea's bold decision to leave Woodbury, and what her fate might be" (Darabont, Kirkman, Moore, Adlard, Mazzara, Reilly, & Schwartz, 2013). *Talking Dead* host Chris Hardwick further promoted the plot-related hashtag when he read tweets utilizing this hashtag on the air. Viewers mentioned the March 17 plot-related hashtag (#OuttaThere) in 23,399 tweets.

In addition to plot-related hashtags, *Pretty Little Liars* also incorporated narrative into a hashtag for the March 12 episode. After one character complained about the smell of a morgue, the hashtag #ISmellDeadPeople appeared on the screen. Since both *Pretty Little Liars* and *The Walking Dead* consistently used plot-related on-screen hashtags, I decided to compare these two programs.

Viewers utilized *The Walking Dead* plot-related hashtags more often than *Pretty Little Liars* plot-related hashtags, even though *Pretty Little Liars* featured more plot-related hashtags on-screen each week. Although *Pretty Little Liars* viewers are highly active online, perhaps the promotion of *The Walking Dead*'s plot-related hashtags during the talk show *Talking Dead* contributed to a higher number of tweets. Network executives use hashtags as way of encouraging Twitter conversations about their programs. *Talking Dead* focuses solely on discussing that night's episode of *The Walking Dead*, examining the details of specific plotlines and sharing viewer reactions on the air. It is

possible that *Talking Dead* acted as a one-hour reminder for viewers to continue using the hashtags they saw on-screen that night.

Similar trends occurred with *Walking Dead* and *Pretty Little Liars* on-screen hashtags, producer-created hashtags and title-based hashtags. Although *Pretty Little Liars* utilized more hashtags, *The Walking Dead* generated a higher average number of tweets. Perhaps a larger number of available hashtags fragments the Twitter conversation. Maybe networks could increase their Twitter conversation volume by organizing online discussions around a limited number of hashtags. Even though *The Walking Dead* only used one title-based hashtag in each episode, it still outperformed #PrettyLittleLiars, which appeared on-screen at least four times in each episode of *Pretty Little Liars*. Obviously a higher number of on-screen hashtag appearances does not equal a higher number of viewer tweets.

Perhaps *The Walking Dead's* large Twitter following (currently at 1.5 million) contributed to several other results. Although a majority of this study's hashtags (60%) appeared in the lower right corner of the screen, viewers mentioned the hashtags placed in the lower left corner in more tweets. The success of *The Walking Dead's* title-based hashtag, which always appeared in the lower left corner, may have skewed the results. I believe that viewers are not accustomed to seeing graphics in the upper left and right corners, and therefore may not notice hashtags placed in those locations. Since viewers are accustomed to graphics at the bottom of the television screen, hashtags in the bottom corners may gain more attention. However, since the majority of television networks utilize the lower right corner for network logos, hashtags placed in that location may get lost among all the graphics.

Only *Hannibal* utilized the entire bottom of the screen. This location, used for their @NBCHannibal mention, produced the lowest number of tweets. Perhaps viewers prefer using hashtags instead of @ mentions in their Twitter conversations about television programs. Also,

*Hannibal* was the only program in this study to mention a Twitter handle on-screen. Most programs only use Twitter hashtags on-screen.

Where did networks present these hashtags within their one-hour air times? After categorizing each on-screen hashtag based on what type of scene it accompanied (opening scene, after a commercial break, sometime in between a pair of commercial breaks, before a commercial break or during the episode's final scene), results showed that over half of this study's hashtags appeared on-screen immediately after a commercial break. During live television, viewers may use commercial breaks as an opportunity to leave the room momentarily, or utilize their digital devices (smartphones and tablets). As a show returns from the break, perhaps producers want to encourage viewers to chat about the show online. Although the viewers are tuned into live TV, maybe producers want to foster a "fear of missing out" on the conversations taking place online. Perhaps this means that producers are not concerned with disrupting viewer transportation into the narrative environment. If they are concerned about viewers dividing their attention between the show and their mobile devices, producers should schedule on-screen hashtag appearances immediately before a commercial break.

*Pretty Little Liars* always added a second plot-related hashtag to each episode in between a pair of commercial breaks. *The Walking Dead* always placed their weekly plot-based hashtag before a commercial break. This is wise timing, since the hashtag and accompanying audio narration also act as an advertisement for the program *Talking Dead*. Since part of the talk show is devoted to that night's plot-related hashtag, *Talking Dead* further promotes the use of this hashtag.

Only one hashtag appeared at the end of a program. *Scandal* included their only plot-related hashtag (#WhoIsTheMole) after the March 28 episode. Since it appeared after the episode ended and only remained on-screen for an instant, viewers may have missed it. ABC could have increased the Twitter conversation organized around this hashtag by increasing its screen time and

embedding it within an appropriate scene. Since the hashtag refers to a season-wide storyline, the network could have utilized the hashtag in several scenes, or even repeated the hashtag across several episodes.

The length of time a hashtag remains on-screen does not predict the volume of tweets mentioning that hashtag. *The Walking Dead's* title-based hashtag remained on screen for sixty seconds, longer than any other hashtag observed in this study. Although the regression failed to reveal a relationship between a hashtag's total screen time and the number of tweets mentioning that hashtag, the length of the hashtag exposure on the screen could still explain why #TheWalkingDead outperformed #PrettyLittleLiars. Perhaps hashtags must remain on-screen for a specific amount of time in order to trigger complementarity (as well as the "fear of missing out"). Viewers might need to see a hashtag on-screen for a number of seconds before they become engaged and feel motivated to join the conversation online.

How are audiences using hashtags in their Twitter conversations regarding television programs? Both network and cable television viewers used hashtags with no significant difference between the two audiences. But are they utilizing the hashtags provided by the television networks, or are they creating their own hashtags?

Although viewers used slightly more producer-created hashtags (both on-screen and Twitter-only) than user-created hashtags, there was no significant difference between the two categories. Perhaps producer-created hashtags are more well-known. They may benefit from promises of prizes if these hashtags are used and rewards for retweets. In addition to the number of Twitter followers, perhaps retweets could also be included in future research.

All four television programs utilized an on-screen hashtag that included the show title, but viewers routinely created hashtags featuring variations of the title. AMC promoted the official hashtag #TheWalkingDead, but viewer Twitter conversations sometimes included hashtags like

#TWD or #WalkingDead. *Pretty Little Liars* viewers also occasionally abbreviated with the hashtag #PLL. Perhaps viewers choose to create their own abbreviated title-based hashtags in order to conserve the number of characters used in the tweet.

Networks plant hashtags within their shows, hoping that they will be utilized in online discussions and act as word of mouth advertising. They also occasionally offer prizes for using their (producer-created) hashtags or reward followers for retweeting their messages. The word clouds also included other producer-created hashtags that did not appear on-screen. Networks promoted these hashtags elsewhere on social media. *Pretty Little Liars* promised to divulge a spoiler if fans made the hashtag #PLLSpoiler a trending topic (Del Rey, 2013). The promotion worked, and the network revealed a plot point from the season four premiere. AMC promoted the hashtag #PreyForAndrea on Facebook on March 17, 2013, the day the episode “Prey” aired. This episode focused on a character named Andrea. Although this hashtag did not appear on-screen, Twitter listed it as a worldwide trending topic. AMC also used other hashtags on Twitter to promote a *Walking Dead* mobile app (#DeadYourself) and video game (#TWDsurvival). The network also created a hashtag to interact with fans (#TWDdeleted). *Pretty Little Liars* promoted a hashtag to refer to their partnership with *Entertainment Weekly* in late February (#EWlovesPLL).

## **Limitations**

It is important to understand how limited access to the information within Radian6 affected the data used in this study. I identified user-created hashtags by pulling the word clouds for the on-screen (producer-created) hashtags. The total number of tweets for user-created hashtags only reflects the number of times viewers used it in conjunction with an on-screen hashtag; therefore, this number does not accurately represent the total number of times viewers used user-created hashtags. This number does not reflect any instances of viewers using only a user-created hashtag in a tweet. The manner in which I pulled information from Radian6 did not identify those tweets.

Also, perhaps additional user-created hashtags exist. I only discovered those user-created hashtags that viewers used in conjunction with an on-screen hashtag (or the most common abbreviated show title hashtags).

For instance, viewers mentioned #Prey in 1,009 of the tweets that also used the hashtag #OuttaThere (which appeared on-screen in the March 17 episode of *The Walking Dead*, see Figure 3.2). Unfortunately, Radian6 searches are limited to the preceding thirty days. Upon further examination of the research questions, data and results, I would have also conducted a separate search for #Prey to see how many times viewers used this hashtag. Since the search period of March 17-18 is now outside the thirty-day search window, I can no longer access that information. Even if I had access to the total number of times viewers used #Prey during March 17-18, this hashtag is too vague to be certain that all of the tweets were referencing a *Walking Dead* episode.

Also, some overlap may exist. For instance, both #TheWalkingDead and #LoneWolf appeared on-screen in the March 3 episode of *The Walking Dead*. Viewers mentioned the title-based hashtag (#TheWalkingDead) 257,372 times. Viewers mentioned the plot-based hashtag (#LoneWolf) 34,355 times. It is possible that some viewers could have written one tweet that included both hashtags. The totals for these hashtags should be thought of as the number of times viewers mentioned the hashtag, not a total of unique tweets. Finally, as previously mentioned, any tweets containing the user-created hashtag #Scandal (included in this study) could be referring to things other than the ABC television program.

Each program's popularity could have affected my results. Both cable programs (*The Walking Dead* and *Pretty Little Liars*) may have attracted a larger online following since they are both based on an existing series of publications. Also, they also both have around a million and a half Twitter followers. Although NBC's *Hannibal* is also based on existing media (a series of books and several motion picture adaptations), the program has a smaller Twitter following due to the

fact that the show premiered in April 2013. During this study, *Scandal* was in its second season, and both *The Walking Dead* and *Pretty Little Liars* were in their third seasons.

Finally, I adjusted my dataset to account for the programs that repeated their title-based hashtag several times during each episode. For instance, the hashtag #Hannibal appeared on-screen twice during the April 11 episode of *Hannibal*. Each hashtag remained on-screen for 10 seconds. I adjusted the first instance of this hashtag's appearance to reflect the total amount of time the network promoted this specific hashtag on-screen (20 seconds). Since this case also reflected the total number of times viewers mentioned #Hannibal within the 48-hour window (16,163 times), I omitted the repeat appearance from my dataset.

### **Suggestions for Future Research**

If this study were replicated, researchers should conduct additional Radian6 searches using each user-created hashtag identified in the word clouds. Conducting a separate search would produce the number of times the user-created hashtag was used within the search period, as opposed to the number of times it was used in conjunction with a producer-created hashtag.

Future research could also alter the dates of the search period. This study only examined Twitter activity on the day the program aired and the following day. Nielsen now offers C3 ratings for programs—the number of viewers spread across three days. The C3 ratings attempt to capture viewers watching shows recorded on DVRs. Network executives and advertisers are currently arguing over whether Nielsen should expand their ratings to C7—the number of viewers measured over seven days (Crupi, 2012). It would be interesting to search Radian6 for hashtags using three separate search periods: the day of the broadcast (to capture Twitter activity related to live viewing), a three day window that begins with the day of the broadcast (to mirror C3 viewers), and a seven day window that begins with the day of the broadcast (C7). This design would allow researchers to observe how the Twitter conversation drops off during the week after a show airs.

Some network executives are hesitant to ask their viewers to exit the narrative environment, even momentarily, in order to utilize a program app or engage in online conversations during live TV. Although I observed some Twitter conversations taking place during live television, I am curious to know if the conversations change after my 48-hour window. During live TV, perhaps viewers simply state that they are watching a show using a title-based hashtag. In order to avoid disruption to their transportation experience while watching a show, viewers might save in-depth discussions for later in the week. By searching Radian6 for a second 48-hour period, researchers might see an increase in plot-related hashtag usage.

An interesting follow up to this study could include producer-created hashtags that are only used on Twitter. Although these hashtags are not used on-screen, are they also adopted by fans? *Hannibal* used the hashtag #UnderTheBed in a tweet to refer to a recent storyline involving a killer hiding under a bed, and #FeedYourFear as a reference to Dr. Lecter's habit of consuming his murder victims. *The Walking Dead* does not return to television until October 2013, but producers are attempting to stay connected with fans on Twitter, using hashtags like #WalkerWithdrawals. Viewers would only discover these hashtags if they follow the shows on Twitter. Following a program indicates a deeper level of engagement. Viewers that utilize Twitter-only producer-created hashtags did not see them on a television screen. These viewers are opting-in to receive updates on a subject that interests them.

Future research could also explore the content of viewer tweets, looking specifically for calls to action (tweets that include a link for the reader to follow), any attached media (photos or video), sentiment, comments on the television program and narrative elements (see Figure 5.1). Calls to action illustrate complementarity and a higher level of viewer engagement with a program, since the viewer sought out additional media or information and provided a link in their tweet. This type of viewer is motivated to search for more information, and also wishes to share it with others



on Twitter. Any quotes from the show could be considered narrative content. Narrative content is an example of a tweet that illustrates a higher level of viewer engagement, compared with tweets containing neutral sentiment or those that simply state what show the viewer is watching. More highly engaged viewers will remember and quote lines on Twitter.

Using items from Busselle and Bilandzic's (2009) narrative engagement scale as inspiration, a content analysis of viewer tweets could also produce examples of viewer transportation into a narrative world. More highly engaged audience members may view Twitter as another way to escape to their favorite world or setting, and choose to discuss the environment or town that the show's characters inhabit. Tweets that mention these environments exhibit transportation, allowing viewers to imagine how they would behave in a fictional world. Viewer tweets can also indicate emotional engagement with a fictional television character, expressing emotions towards a character or relating to the character's emotions (i.e. "I felt sorry for some of the characters," Busselle & Bilandzic, 2009, p. 329).

Both casual viewers and those deeply invested in a program can experience complementarity. Casual viewers may tweet simply to let others know what they are watching. Transportation and emotional engagement signify a deeper viewer relationship with a program. More highly engaged viewers may tweet to express strong opinions or deep attachments to characters. Either way, networks should move beyond declarations of how many tweets their shows generate. Details culled from viewer tweets would help networks understand the types of relationships viewers have with their programs and characters, and benefit producers attempting to craft messages and connect with viewers.

Although Facebook recently announced that hashtags are now functional (clickable and searchable) on their network, future researchers might want to incorporate data from microblogging site Tumblr (Bosker, 2013). In an article on Facebook's hashtags, The



Figure 5.1: Content analysis of tweets

Huffington Post quoted a teenager who succinctly summarized the difference between the two sites: “Facebook is good for staying in touch with people who you know in real life . . . Tumblr is better for finding people who share your interests” (Bosker, 2013, para. 10). Although they do not include a hashtag symbol, tags are functional on Tumblr as well. Many television fans are now turning to the site due to its ability to “reblog” content from other sites. BuzzFeed calls NBC’s interactions with *Hannibal* fans on Tumblr “unprecedented,” and mentions the network’s “humorous use of tags” (Hall, 2013, para. 17-18).

Although viewers have an array of social media sites to choose from, their specific complementarity goals may lead them to select specific sites. Simple conversations about shows may occur on Twitter, whereas more detailed co-creation and sharing of media may take place on

Tumblr. By understanding how viewers use these sites, networks can fine tune their dialogue with viewers.

## Conclusion

Television is currently undergoing a variety of changes. Industry analysts are redefining how to measure an audience. The major networks struggle to hold onto viewers as the number of original cable programs increases. Television is also luring film stars to roles on the small screen. Although actor Kevin Bacon is primarily known for his work in motion pictures, he currently stars in a new Fox network thriller *The Following*. At a June 2013 event in New York, Bacon described his hesitation to accept a role in a television series:

I started out in the industry at a time when there was a really big dividing line between those two: movie careers and television careers . . . a lot of the perception within the business was that to go on to a television show was kind of a step backward. (Paley Center for Media, 2013)

The quality of television programs has improved over the last decade. Cable networks AMC and FX, previously known for airing older movies, are now producing critically acclaimed original television series like *Mad Men*, *The Walking Dead*, *Sons of Anarchy* and *The Americans*. AMC's *The Walking Dead*, based on a series of graphic novels, was just named the highest-rated scripted program of the 2012-13 season, based on the 18-49 demographic (Molloy, 2013). This marks the first time a cable series has earned the number one spot.

Although television now offers higher quality entertainment, industry analysts are currently debating how to best measure the size of television audiences. A March 2013 *Wired* article criticized Nielsen's outdated television ratings system, which focuses on estimating the number of eyes in front of television sets (Vanderbilt, 2013). These ratings do not include the numerous methods of streaming or downloading shows to TVs and other electronic devices. But author Tom Vanderbilt is hopeful, mentioning the new Nielsen Twitter TV rating as a sign of "a potentially

thrilling new era for television, one that values shows that spark conversations” (Vanderbilt, 2013, para. 5). These conversations are taking place on message boards, social media, blogs and within social TV apps.

“But as Nielsen—and other analytics companies—race to capture a show’s true impact across all platforms, it will change the way those shows are valued” (Vanderbilt, 2013, para. 10). Networks are placing a higher value on audience engagement, and therefore are attempting to connect with their viewers and fuel conversations online. Since Twitter’s creation seven years ago, the number of hashtags embedded within television shows has drastically increased. Television networks are encouraging complementarity and media migration by including hashtags on-screen.

This study was not designed to debate whether or not complementarity exists, although it provides evidence of complementarity in action. Millions of people are simultaneously watching live television and tweeting their opinions on programs. Due to the increasing quality of television programming, viewers are forging stronger relationships with TV characters and are eager to share their opinions. Networks are joining viewers online, looking for ways to attract new viewers and mining online data to better understand how existing viewers are reacting to their shows. The combination of an abundance of exceptional programs and producer-driven media convergence might be causing viewers to feel a stronger urge to migrate to new media. If a show’s worth will soon be partially based on their level of engagement with viewers, networks will want to maintain strong a relationship with viewers outside of the program by understanding what viewers want to discuss and where those conversations are likely to take place.

Networks are embracing the idea of co-creation. Each week, *The Walking Dead* retweets viewer Jake Holland’s *Walking Dead*-themed Vine videos, which use the hashtag #TWDvine. HBO’s *Game of Thrones* frequently retweets images of fan artwork and Twitter conversations between

fictional characters from the program, written by viewers. Networks form a closer relationship with viewers by supporting co-creation.

Television networks are forging closer relationships with viewers and beginning to embrace participatory culture, but they could further facilitate viewer transportation into a narrative world. Although networks are beginning to offer blogs written by fictional characters, very few networks operate Twitter accounts for fictional characters, or build real-time tweets into the action seen on-screen. An increasing number of viewers are spending more time online in search of additional content. There may be opportunities for networks to build advertising opportunities into online environments that allow viewers to remain in their favorite fictional settings.

Why foster transportation and engagement with fans? Fandom, specifically those that co-create and spread content through social media, may help shows survive. NBC recently made a last-minute decision to renew *Hannibal* for a second season. A large number of *Hannibal* viewers record the program and watch it later in the week, possibly because the show airs at the same time as ABC's *Scandal* (Andreeva, 2013; "Hannibal Renewed," 2013). Despite the competition, the show received positive reviews and attracted a healthy number of viewers (Andreeva, 2013). BuzzFeed's Ellie Hall believes that the renewal "decision . . . may be attributable, in part, to the rapidly growing, rabid fan base that has embraced the show and spread its popularity across the internet" (Hall, 2013, para. 2).

Engaged viewers can act as word of mouth advertisers for television programs. This fall, social conversations will play a role in a new form of television ratings. In order to attract more viewers, network employees must understand how fan communities work and become familiar with what tools fans use to chat about their favorite television series. This involves an understanding of complementarity. What attracts television viewers to online destinations:

Additional content? Conversations with other viewers? A chance to tweet with cast members?

Networks must understand which types of hashtags resonate with viewers in order to constantly fuel online conversations.

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## APPENDICES

### Part A: Hashtags Codebook

#### Type/style of hashtag

- name of TV program
- includes network
- character's name (#SchmidtBaby, *New Girl*)
- related to plot (#ADay or #QueenOfHearts, *Pretty Little Liars*)

#### Length of hashtag

- total number of characters

#### On-screen location

- lower left
- lower right
- upper left
- upper right
- across entire bottom of screen
- entire screen

#### Placement within program

Each time a hashtag appears on the screen, note its placement within the program.

- during opening scene/beginning of show
- immediately after commercial break
- sometime in between a pair of commercial breaks
- immediately before commercial break
- during final scene/end of show

#### Timestamp

How many minutes into the program before the hashtag appears?

#### Timed with plot/dramatic moment?

- yes/no

#### Frequency/Repetition

Note the total number of times the hashtag appears on the screen during the program.

#### Time on Screen

Note the length of time the hashtag remains on the screen.



## Part B: TV Program Hashtag Content Analysis Form

Name of program: \_\_\_\_\_

Date/time aired: \_\_\_\_\_

Network: \_\_\_\_\_

Season/Episode: \_\_\_\_\_

Hashtag: \_\_\_\_\_

Style: (circle)

-name of TV program: yes no

-includes network: yes no

-character's name: yes no If yes, character's name: \_\_\_\_\_

-related to plot: yes no If yes, note how: \_\_\_\_\_

Length (total characters): \_\_\_\_\_

On-screen location (circle)

upper left      upper right

lower left      lower right

Placement within program (check all that apply) \_\_\_\_\_ minutes into show

\_\_during opening scene/beginning of show

\_\_immediately after commercial break

\_\_sometime in between a pair of commercial breaks

\_\_immediately before commercial break

\_\_during final scene/end of show

Timed with plot/dramatic moment? yes no

Total number of times hashtag is shown: \_\_\_\_\_

Time on screen: \_\_\_\_\_

Anything else on screen?

## Part C: SPSS Coding

Hashtag: The hashtag under examination

ID: unique number assigned to each hashtag (01, 02, 03, 04...)

Episode: I have assigned an episode number to each of the 12 episodes, using the show title and airdate (WD3313 refers to The Walking Dead's March 31, 2013 episode)

Show:           1=Scandal  
                  2=Hannibal  
                  3=Pretty Little Liars  
                  4=The Walking Dead

Channel:       1=network  
                  2=cable

Creator: Who created/promoted the hashtag?  
          1=producer (hashtags created by networks)  
          2=user (hashtags created by viewers using Twitter)

OnScreen: Did the hashtag appear on-screen? (This question used to filter out those that did not appear on-screen.) 1=yes, 2=no

Phrase: Is this a hashtag or a phrase (show title)?  
          1=hashtag  
          2=phrase

ShowName: Does the hashtag include the show's title? 1=yes, 2=no

CharacterName: Does the hashtag include a character's name? 1=yes, 2=no

TitleVsPlot: Categorize the hashtag (used to filter out those that did not use either the show title or reference the plot).  
              1=Show title  
              2=Plot-related

PlotRelated: Is the hashtag related to the plot? 1=yes, 2=no

HashtagLength: number of characters in the hashtag (does not include the pound sign)

ScreenLocation: location of the hashtag on the screen  
                  1=upper left corner of the screen  
                  2=lower left corner of the screen  
                  3=upper right corner of the screen  
                  4= lower right corner of the screen  
                  5=entire bottom of screen  
                  6=entire screen

Timestamp: number of minutes into the show (when hashtag appears)

Placement:     1=during opening scene/beginning of show  
                  2=immediately after commercial break  
                  3=sometime in between a pair of commercial breaks  
                  4=immediately before commercial break  
                  5=during final scene/end of show

PlotSync: Is the appearance of the hashtag purposefully timed with the plot or a dramatic moment?  
              1=yes  
              2=no

Screentime: the number of seconds the hashtag appears on-screen

Tweets: the number of tweets containing this hashtag

Trend: Was the hashtag listed as a trending topic?

AddHashtags: Did the tweets containing this hashtag also include any other hashtags?  
                  1=yes  
                  2=no

AddHashtagType: If the hashtag was used in conjunction with another hashtag, what type?  
                  1=producer- created  
                  2=user-created  
                  3=both

## **VITA**

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