DISSERTATION

POPCORN THOUGHTS: A PODCAST ECONOMY OF FILM CRITICISM

Submitted by

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ABSTRACT

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This qualitative study questions how podcasters review films, engage with audiences, and contribute to film and media discourses. The literature exploring podcast cultures and film criticism had not intersected to a large extent, and this ethnographic inquiry into a case study of five podcast film critics provides an entry point for audio criticism scholarship. The research umbrella drew from film writing and critique cultures (Corrigan, 2015; McWhirter, 2016) and podcast analyses (Llinares, Fox, & Berry, 2018; Spinelli & Dann, 2019) to situate the patterns of discourse and production activities (Fairclough, 2003) within a framework of media sociology (Shoemaker & Reese, 2014). The research engaged with over 55 hours of content and various communication technologies in the winter of 2020/2021. The meso-level analysis considered the data from podcasts as a collective group to focus on the patterns across the audio critic culture (Kozinets, 2010). The findings reflect that audio critics can be further studied as a field of criticism as the collective group followed routines and enacted activities above individual and organizational levels of influence. Niches also frame the contributions of audio critics to the media and film discourse ecosystem as they extend film consumption rituals through discussion and provide a forum for participatory culture among their audiences.

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CHAPTER 1.   INTRODUCTION

Wisecrack—a short statement typically marked by snark. Ringer—an entertainment idiom to describe a person used to bolster performance and gain an advantage. Nitpick—a pedantic form of fault-finding.

However, within certain digital media spheres, wisecrack, ringer, and nitpicking encompass a robust system of actors re-scripting and assembling popular culture narratives to disrupt traditional gated practices of criticism: far more intellectual and nuanced than some may assume podcasts about films would be. Wisecrack, Ringer Network, Mostly Nitpicking, and others in the roster of podcasts available to mass audiences through audio streaming platforms blend academic and trade discourse with fandom insights from 'average' consumers through entertaining yet socially conscious personae. The podcast economy indicates an expanding field of media critics using audio, video, and the power of the internet age to contribute to the discourse of popular culture. The variety of film review podcasts provide sites for scholarly inquiry on 1) the contributions of podcasts in the media ecosystem, 2) how the activities of podcasters relate to other forms of discourse, and 3) how the podcasts create a community around their discourse. This project considered three questions while following five case studies of podcasts centered on film reviews during the winter of 2020/2021. The podcasts demonstrated contributions to the ritual of film consumption by extending the time spent with a film; they demonstrated a subfield of film criticism; they provided public forums for their communities to interact. Each critic contributed through a niche of discourse and leveraged communication technologies to interact in the sphere of film criticism.

Media convergence collapsed the space between production and consumption practices while altering audience expectations around participation with entertainment, journalism, and public deliberation (Jenkins, 2003/2012; Keeline, 2017; Macnamara, 2010; Singer, 2010; Warner, 2002). Cinema culture provides a site to explore how routines of production and consumption evolve with increased access to mass media technologies and information sharing. Film criticism resides at the

intersection of cultural, economic, and political capital and is experiencing a crisis event—an influential

moment sparking change—due to emerging actors and technologies in the critical practice, even before

the COVID-19 pandemic's impacts on cultural production (Frey, 2015). This study examines the

interpretive communities among the film prosumers [audiences who consume and produce content while

blurring the professional/amateur divide (Macnamara, 2010, p. 122)] to explore an emerging sector of

audio film criticism by mapping the routines of communication and interactions in the space. The

prosumers, which I refer to as **audio critics**, represent film reviewers who integrate podcasts and

communication technology in the production and distribution of content (Jenkins, 2003/2012; Singer,

2008). These audio critics possess cultural capital, as demonstrated through growing subscriber networks,

and generate legitimacy with digital approaches extending legacy practices from print-based critics (Frey

& Sayad, 2015; Keeline, 2017). The markers of legitimacy for audio critics as a subfield extend the

boundary of film culture criticism into new spaces while introducing a new type of critical cultural

authority related to popular entertainment. The findings from this study provide a foundation for future

research on the subfield and boundary work, in addition to explorations on persona, collective memory,

and participatory culture in audio/visual film spaces.

Films, as forms of artistic expression and cultural artifacts, provide audiences with models,

narratives, and implied moralities that interact with hegemonic values (Kellner & Durham, 2012).

Moreover, the patterns of conversation around the artifacts are as crucial as the text itself as consumers

interpret, react, reinforce, and support the messages within. Film criticism has served the public as a field

of facilitators setting the *official*[1] path of discourse for media texts. Legacy news organizations with

access into the prestige-based economy—affiliation with high-brow, intellectual, and professional

institutions—have traditionally held power to set the social discourse about films (Gans, 1999; Hurault-

Paupe, 2015); reviewers and critics have typically been trained cultural journalists following canonical

patterns of critique (Giannetti, 2011). Changes in communication technology, such as Blogs during Web

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[1] By official, I mean published and mass mediated patterns of discourse compared to informal dialogue
among people.

2.0, allowed additional perspectives and patterns to emerge; however, these patterns tend not to diverge far from the established norm due to similar market and production forces on both producer and consumer (Deuze, 2008; Schudson, 2011). Also, the norms of how to *write* about films tend to follow set patterns, enacting a habitus for film writers, based on presumed audience needs and Hollywood production paths: summarizing the plot; recommending/not recommending the text; describing the characters and shots; and other aspects of film such as costumes, score, screenwriting, and acting (Corrigan, 2015). This project considered existing patterns while remaining flexible to the emergent routines connected to the podcast market and production influences. Three primary discoveries emerged for the audio critics in the podcast space:

- Audio critics contribute to the ecosystem of media by offering niches of discourse as canonical, technical, interpretive, and affective perspectives on film analysis. Within each niche, the audio critics did follow some paths for summarizing the plot and describing aspects of the film while also diverging into new types of discussion like the Logic Interrogation (unpacked in Chapter 4), which questions the internal structures of a narrative.

- Audio critics demonstrate a subfield of film criticism following the central premise of evaluating and contextualizing films within a culture for audiences. The routines followed by all five cases outside of their organizational or niche influences point towards a structuring structure, or habitus, that help classify a field of practice.

- Audio critics provide public forums for audiences to participate in the review process. Critics with stronger affiliation to the audience can leverage the technologic infrastructure to provide live streams and real-time chats or insert listener emails and voicemails into the episodes. All the critics offered space through social media for their community to engage with itself.

The remainder of the introduction is broken into four sections to orient you to the research on these audio critics. This research considered the audio critics at the meso-level of analysis, viewing their actions in relation to the collective group and not the individual rhetoric they provided about movies. As we move through the research and chapters, that distinction for the scope of this study remains important. First, the

research context is provided with attention to COVID-19, a brief history of film production, the state of podcast media, and my researcher positionality. As a qualitative ethnography, a reflective process from the researcher is good practice to increase rigor and acknowledge the role of a human in collecting, analyzing, and interpreting the observed behaviors of the sample. After that, I provide a terms and definitions section because this research introduces structures and language to describe the observed practices from an emergent field with little prior literature available. The final section is a research summary with explanations on how the dissertation is organized.

1.1 The Research Context

This section provides historical information for context on where and how this research is situated in culture and time. The entire research process was conducted, from proposal through the final defense, during the COVID-19 pandemic. Much of the work was completed during lock-down protocols, which influenced the film industry. The audio critics in the sample continued making content, largely drawing on video on demand or streaming archives when selecting films. Future research mirroring this work after the pandemic would serve as a strong complement. Beyond the COVID-19 situation, this section provides a brief history of the film and podcast industries to bring you up to speed on the technologies and practices of production. Last, I offer a reflection on my situation as a researcher and play participant in the ethnography.

1.1.1 COVID-19

During the Spring of 2020, as I wrote the proposal and refined the study, the COVID-19 outbreak reached the United States. The United States surpassed 200,000 COVID-19 related deaths in the fall of 2020, just as the research timeline was set to begin. The new milestone occurred after nine months of quarantines, lockdowns, and closures disrupted the culture industries heavily. This research does not shy away or discredit the experience of everyone, literally, living through a pandemic. The audio critics frequently talked about the pandemic and the state of the industry. My experience as a film goer and play participant in this study was disrupted due to lock-downs just the same as the sample and their audiences.

We all went through it. And culture was not, and likely will not ever be, quite the same as before. The film industry was heavily impacted by COVID-19 with direct context on this study.

Films slated for March releases were pushed to July to be pushed back again and again. <u>Mulan</u> (2020) from Disney represents a perfect example of distribution impacts on the industry: the original release date was March 9, 2020. While COVID-19 did not yet impact the United States, Chinese and other global markets were well into isolation procedures. Disney pushed the release to September 4, 2020, through its streaming platform, Disney+ (IMDB, Release Schedule). Not only was the date of distribution altered due to COVID, but the medium was as well. The reception to <u>Mulan</u> is highly mixed, but one factor could be the difference in experiencing a film meant for theatrical screens and audio equipment on a home system. Disney charged $29.99 (on top of the Disney+ subscription), and metrics on the economic success are unclear as that data is not tracked the way box office sales are provided. On the other side, Warner Bros. decided to test the theater market with <u>Tenet</u> on September 3, 2020. The film brought around 20 million domestic for the opening weekend, estimated at half of a 'typical' release weekend for a Christopher Nolan production (Barnes, 2020). Much later, <u>Tenet</u> was released for video on demand, which was covered by the audio critics. Other films were released over streaming and covered by the sample: <u>Wonder Woman 1984</u> was on HBOMax, and <u>Soul</u> on Disney+ were reviewed by critics from home.

Another example of the production impact on Hollywood is <u>The Batman</u>. The Warner Bros. latest addition to the DC comic verse was first delayed for production in March before resuming in the fall. In early September, Warner Bros. stated that filming was once again paused because of a positive COVID-19 case on the production team. Many entertainment and art outlets reported Robert Pattinson, the lead actor playing Bruce Wayne, was the positive test (Ortiz & Sperling, 2020). Other celebrities reported positive cases, such as actors Tom Hanks and Dwayne Johnson. To my observations and knowledge, none of the audio critics were directly impacted by COVID-19 in their production of the podcasts—though that threat was ever-present.

The changes or delays in distribution and production ripple out into my research sample and must be contextualized. The sampling period would typically exist over the film festival and Awards season; however, the Academy Awards took place in April 2021 instead of early February, and many films showing at festivals were not widely released. COVID-19 turned the winter from a ritualized period of special coverage into a typical period for sampling film discourse. Audio critics rely on the film industry for content, often delivering reviews on newly released movies. Some of the podcast hosts expressed a willingness to return to theaters as part of their critical experience, while others stuck with VOD options and stated they did not feel safe enough to return to theaters until a vaccine was released.

Nando from Mostly Nitpicking, January 12, 2021, 147:45, Link
We are all going to be invincible in 2021 because we will get the vaccine, right? No?

Vaccines were not widely available until April 2021 and well after the sampling period had concluded. While many critics seemed optimistic for the return to the theater, they mostly recognized that Hollywood would likely be forever changed—especially as we got used to watching movies from home instead.

COVID-19 did not impact the goals of this study greatly because I focused on meso-level routines of the collective group, which by definition of a routine, should be resistant to change. Additionally, the audio critics have had over nine months to adjust the routines to the influences of the new normal before the sampling period, and with the "end" of the pandemic difficult to predict the new normal may persist. And last, COVID-19 offers a basis for future research as one could replicate this study after the pandemic ends to compare the collective patterns of routines identified in this study to a new sampling period.

Overall, COVID-19 impacted almost everything. It will be referenced throughout the analysis because it exists throughout the research and analysis period. We will keep the context in mind while recognizing that routines of discourse can exist and endure through remarkable times such as a pandemic.

1.1.2 A Brief Film History and Practices of Production

Films, as artifacts of cultural production practices, offer a snapshot of the time, place, and influential forces within a historical moment. As containers for the practices and routines of the industry

during moments in cultural development, films are inherently shaped by political, economic, social, and structural interactions during the production process (Caldwell, 2008; Holt & Perren, 2009). This study explores how political, economic, social, and other factors appear in discursive routines and contributions of audio critics. I map the dominant practices of production in the entertainment industry to consider how these routines influence films and audio criticism.

Dynamics of power run through processes in cultural production and inform the organizational, institutional, and routine structures of the system in place. Power operates in the discourses of society as discourse is the socially, institutionally, and historically situated driver of meaning in a system (McKerrow, 1989). Through the narratives shared by trade workers, the institutional influences on the production routines become evident. The 'below the line' workers with technical responsibilities circulate discourses of production "war stories" to build up their legitimacy within the systems of power while 'above the line' workers in the creative roles share genesis narratives of their artistic pedigree (Caldwell, 2008). The discourse of professionalism provides power to the actors in the production systems by invoking a sense of specialized knowledge distinct from others outside of the field (Caroline Frick in Holt & Perren, 2011) and exposes the routines of production at play for each specialization. Below the line craftsfolk talk about their challenging labor acts, while above the line focus on their creative accolades to exert power and control within their situated positions and to distinguish themselves from other positions in cultural production work.

Media companies, as organizations within the entertainment institution, enacted consolidation practices to combat the shifts in market share, technologies, and audience behaviors (Thompson & Bordwell, 2010). Companies attempted lateral synergy to capture more channels of revenue through fewer products via franchising. The intention was to commercialize culture through the lens of business practice rather than artistic function in society (Horkheimer & Adorno, 1944/2012). The lucrative appeal of mass-produced culture required systematic routines from the technical workers through the channels of distribution to increase efficiencies and while controlling audience expectations. The use of users' manuals, institution events, and production procedures was developed as efficient production practices

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(Havens, Lotz & Tinic, 2009). Film-making became more formulaic with tasks that could be readily trained and workers who could be replaced as needed.

One place of routinized and specialized production rests in the technical roles in film production. The technical practices of editing take the raw footage captured by the camera operators and interpret the director's story (Thompson & Bowen, 2013). The role of the editor in the production ultimately decides the final tone, style, and vision of the film; however, editors have received little recognition in the production process (Thompson & Bowen, 2013). The routines and specialization of the editor rest near the bottom of the trade worker hierarchy and reflect an imagined form of work by many further up the ladder (Caldwell, 2008). Editing companies specialized in this work can be brought into and let go of projects like interchangeable machinery with few consumers knowing. The technological affordances of editing machines, the computing power, and the functions that editors must work within reflect routine actions and are limited by the grammar of the edit itself. The shots selected for use, the cuts made, and the transitions follow proscribed guidelines and expectations and are limited by the technologies at hand. These factors in production shape the films we receive.

The process of cultural production builds variations within basic structures of entertainment to sell more tickets to the cinema, as production holds no value until exchanged within the capitalist marketplace. The cinema industry rescripts the familiar archetypes, elements, and narratives of known genres into films just different enough for audiences to engage with a new experience and historical situation (Grant, 2012). The audience gets to know the star actors, who often perform the archetypes in "new" forms for each role through synergistic practices. For example, radio and film partnerships developed to have starring actors in a film appear in radio programming for cross-promotion (Hilmes, 2013). The synergy and importance of marketing in Hollywood routines exist to regulate expectations in covert, seemingly grass-root forms (Perren, 2004). Today, stars contribute to YouTube videos and interviews on televised red carpets as routines to generate interest in their new, though largely the same, roles while appearing beyond the direct control of the studio marketing engine. Film critics have played a

role in the marketing dynamics of films by reviewing early screeners and recommended films to their audiences.

The presence of genre within the institutional framework of production impacts the routines that creatives follow. The idea of genre reflects a description of the relationship between inner and outer forms of a film: the structure and the socialized meaning (Buscombe, 2012). The qualities of the setting, costume design, weapons, and more contribute to the classification of the film produced and thus the audience's understanding (Buscombe, 2012). Genre provides a guidance system to understand movies that share similar conventions and serve as a contract between the filmmaker and the viewer (Deleyto, 2012; Grant, 2012). Within the genre and film structure at large, the audience can typically predict the trajectory of the narrative. While an artistic reading may critique the predictability of film as a negative for culture (Horkheimer & Adorno, 1944/2012), the economic influences of production find the system beneficial. Audiences know what to expect, and companies can predict the value of the project more readily. The structural influence of these conventions has limiting effects in the production process as genres that historically perform well, such as comedy, action-adventure, and horror, are emphasized over experimental forms that may not pay off in the economic sense (Thompson & Bordwell, 2010). As such, influences of the genre as categories—a concept open to critique from media scholarship and audio critics—impact the production practices for culture.

Digital media restructured the dynamics of power across entertainment industries with impacts on the practices of production. While high-level views of the practices of production often situate companies in a place of ultimate authority over the means of production, the political economy of the times exerts influence to consider (Havens, Lotz & Tinic, 2009). The power dynamics in the control of cultural labor production shifts with this user-generated content and increased technological affordances, placing the professional practices of trade workers at risk under the participatory framework of unruly technologies and audiences (Caldwell, 2008). The changing technology environment lowered the barriers for participation and input from audiences in the production process (Jenkins, 2003). The feedback loop between creators and audiences presented new influences on the social media ecosystem that amplifies

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audience perceptions and power (Navar-Gill, 2018). Traditional critics had maintained one-directional channels through writing, and while comment sections online sometimes appear, the canon of film criticism maintained that power exists with the professional tastemaker. Audiovisual criticism that lives through podcasts and on YouTube is disrupting that power dynamic and opening additional feedback loops and pathways for consumers to enact participatory culture with film discourse and at the end of the line film production and market share.

In conclusion, the practices of cultural production in the entertainment industry shape the films created. The dynamics of power circulate through the production process as a hierarchy of roles and specialization of skills developed. Within the hierarchy of roles, routines and structures of production were developed through editing practices and genre expectations. The production process generates a more subtle and coded variation of the genre form, which ultimately drives ticket sales for audiences seeking a familiar experience. Digital media produces emerging practices of cultural production for entertainment as the participatory culture economy grows in abundance, power, and sophistication. The emerging practices at the intersection of economic and political powers offer a rich site for media scholarship, particularly when considering the function of individuals within digital media.

1.1.3 Podcasts as New Media

Stories are linked across mediums: folklore, literature, video games, YouTube channels, television, music, podcasts, and films have all inspired [re]creations of each other. Critics have used the written word, radio, television, and podcasts to share evaluations of film and other art. Sharing via podcasts has roots in radio broadcasting, though podcasting has evolved into a medium of its own rather than a mere extension of the radio culture (Spinelli & Dann, 2019). Intersections between film and radio were established when podcasting emerged as a medium for and by the masses. Podcasts serve as the focus of this research due to the rapid increase in popularity and to complement the existing literature on podcasting for education (Drew, 2017), for organizational communication (Waters et al., 2011), in science contexts (Mackenzie, 2019), and a variety of entertainment and information contexts (Llinares, Fox &

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Berry, 2018; Spinelli & Dann, 2019). This section provides context on the podcast production culture, starting with the roots of radio into podcast history.

Consistent with many mass communication technologies, the development of radio in the 20th Century ties closely to the military and the capitalist institutions. Wireless communication provided essential tools for the U.S. Navy, global shipping, and commercial entertainment. Each sphere of industrial influence allowed the technology to evolve quickly from 1906, when the first "broadcast" played the recording of a holiday concert (Hilmes, 2013).

The United States Navy sponsored research into radio technology with the foresight and necessity of ship-to-ship communication at sea. At the time, the patents for radio components belonged to the Marconi Company, a British enterprise (Hilmes, 2013). Cooperation between the American government and the British allies fostered gains in radio technologies, but after the war, the United States sought to develop its radio technologies independent of global partnerships. The power of narrative production— and more importantly—distribution through radio became a matter of national interest for the flow of ideas and control over interpretive communities (Marshall, 2013). The matter of "national security," coupled with the value that ship-to-ship communication carried for commercial trade industries, pushed the low-key governmental subsidization and assistance in forming an American radio company: *The Radio Corporation of America.* In 1919 General Electric formed RCA as a subsidiary company to specialize in radio and telecommunication development. The board consisted entirely of American citizens with a direct representation of the U.S. government. Shortly after, in 1920, the American Telephone and Telegraph Corporation (AT&T) joined the board with a divisional agreement that RCA would produce and sell receivers and AT&T the transmitters (Hilmes, 2013, p. 43).

The integration of radio into American homes stemmed from a demand for popular entertainment mediums with the "common" person in mind. Before the 1910s, media circulated through the privileged elite; however, urbanization and immigration increased the market share for accessible entertainment mediums (Hilmes, 2013). Throughout the 1920s, amateur radio licenses boomed: until market forces examined the commercial potential to limit the amateur broadcast. In 1922 the Interstate Commerce

Commission instated regulations on amateur licenses prohibiting these producers from disseminating "weather reports, market reports, music, concerts, speeches, news, or similar information or entertainment" (Hilmes, 2013, p. 43). The trend of regulation in favor of capitalist ventures was codified in 1934 by the Communications Act from the newly formed Federal Communication Commission.

Early radio hosts also faced competition for cultural control and market share with the moving pictures of early cinema. The cinema provided a cheap and simple way to capture the public imagination predating RCA. By the turn of the century, the United States had a formal regulatory board—the Motion Picture Patents Company of 1908 (Thompson & Bordwell, 2018). The growth of cinema steadily increased (and has not stopped into the 21st Century) alongside radio. The decades of 1920-1940 established The Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America, led by Will Hayes in 1922, and sound cinema, signaling that motion pictures were becoming a significant industry in the American cultural production institution (Thompson & Bordwell, 2018). However, radio remained desired and competitive as U.S. households could bring the RCA and AT&T products into their homes for daily use as a complement to the spectacle experience of cinema houses. By the 1940s, eight out of ten U.S. households had a radio set, and receivers were integrated into the automobile boom (Hilmes, 2013). The radio lasted, even thrived, through the Great Depression, where cinema experienced a downturn (Thompson & Bordwell, 2018). By the end of the midcentury, Hollywood and radio found a mutually beneficial partnership where talent—and thus market share—moved between mediums in a synergistic rather than competitive way (Hilmes, 2013). The relationship between radio and film continues into contemporary cultural narratives.

The 1960s ushered in social, cultural, and political revolutions with broadcast media at the center. The ideological state apparatus of media was leveraged by politicians and corporations to capitalize on and institutionalize the burgeoning subcultures (Hilmes, 2013). Institutionalization, or incorporation of a subculture, often takes two forms. The dominant industry may 1) commodify the subculture's symbols and content or 2) redefine the deviant behavior (Hebdige, 1979/2012). The radio incorporated the hippie and underground subcultures into the system by hiring the DJs to reach the new markets. The strategy

paid off with FM revenue increasing from "$40 million to $260 million between 1957 and 1975" (Hilmes, 2013, p. 248). The FM boom provided space for a noncommercial public radio push. The foundation and listener-funded model of the Pacifica network in 1969 provided the precursor for the podcasts of today. Both AM and FM stations held steady success throughout the industry and cultural changes into the 1980s.

After steadily simmering in the background of cultural production for the latter 20th Century, radio broadcast technologies found a renewed significance in the digital age. Where early radio constructions were used to promote English as it "should" be spoken to assimilate immigrants and further marginalize Othered communities in the United States (Hilmes, 2013, p. 59), and the midcentury catered to primarily white men as hosts and audience (p. 331). The reborn radio of Web 2.0 offered sites of alternative and resistant voices steeped in a community ritual. Public radio listeners from the 1990s reflect more diverse ethnic, income, gender, and educational backgrounds than other medium forms (p. 332). The trend applies to the streaming podcasts of today.

Podcast is the combination of iPod and broadcast, a name credited to an article in the *Guardian* newspaper in 2004 (Sterling, 2009). A podcast combines elements of journalism, story-telling, subjective-reflection, sounds, music, and language to produce an experience for audiences to engage with topics (Salvati, 2015). The percentage of Americans who listen to podcasts has increased from 22% in 2009 to 41% in ten years (Pew Research Center, 2021). Within a podcast episode, the creator can integrate audio content from texts and collaborate with other storytellers to increase the entertainment value. The traditional radio storytelling was more rigid and controlled by the few, and the current moment of digital interactions provides new avenues among agents of the narrative to co-create stories (Ryan, 2004, p. 338). Multi-media—the convergence of audio, social media, video, text, and visuals—provides a storytelling style that individuals can use to articulate their lived experiences and form connections among their audiences (Hull & Katz, 2006). Podcasts can be distributed easily with apps, such as Anchor, that provide enhanced storytelling tools for creation, distribution, and even monetization for creators: thus a useful and rich site for research. This study provides an entry point to a podcast culture of film criticism.

1.1.4 Researcher Positionality

I am becoming what you might call a cinephile: a lover of film, film theory, and film criticism. I make time to visit the movie theater at least once a month (pre-COVID) and watch several films every weekend at home. I enjoy the affective experience of film (and form strong parasocial bonds with the characters) while actively reflecting on the production culture of cinema arts. What could (should?) be my guest room is filled with movie posters[2] [Star Wars Episode V, Lord of the Rings: The Fellowship of the Ring, Sausage Party, and Avengers End Game], over 40 Blu-Ray and 4K disks, and reclining theater seats. The décor, chosen to transport me into a movie theater, frames a 65-inch flat-screen with crimson red curtains outlined by a string of LED lights to provide the full theater allusion. The other walls display a custom printed pop-art poster of popcorn and a *Cinema Watchlist* where I write in three movies at a time: a classic, a popular, and a critical. I speak about this room to demonstrate my feelings on cinema and to introduce my positionality as both an audience member and an instrument of interpretation. I am the audience for audio critics, just as I am a trained and skilled social science researcher.

Cinema represents a multilayered racial project—from production to consumption practices—which is "simultaneously an interpretation, representation, or explanation of racial identities and meanings" that serve as a context for cultural legitimacy and influence (Omi & Winant, 2015, p. 125; Stewart, 2005). The very nature of film allows for the deconstruction of meaning from various perspectives along the cultural production chain. I gave attention to identity and perspective when selecting my cases for study. Without attention to the identity formations at play, critical cultural work struggles to reveal where a phenomenon is situated within continuing historical projects (Karenga, 1988/2007; Kershaw, 1992). The need to situate the project extends to the researcher's positionality as an instrument for analysis and gatekeeper of the findings. To that end, as the audience/instrument, I embody a multilayered racial project: my lived experiences as a mixed-race Black woman raised and educated in

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[2] Popular entertainment has always captivated me as texts worth far more than many scholar circles perceive. I recall the amused expressions of my graduate classmates when explaining why *Sausage Party* is a favorite film of mine: #haters.

predominantly white institutions gift me with a dual perspective. I have studied aspects of cultural sensitivity and critical consciousness related to entertainment media exposure. To that end, I firmly believe that theory and attention to racial projects should not be segmented into distinct spaces but rather ever-present within every study. The literature and knowledge from Michael Omi and Howard Winant, bell hooks, Melissa Harris-Perry, Patricia Collins, Judith Butler, and other Ethnic Studies, Black scholarship, and feminist perspectives are consistently in mind while collecting data and analyzing the social situations. When needed to explain, understand, and call out behaviors in the study, these voices will be cited and used to inform my writing.

I have also studied and admired the ability of digital practitioners on YouTube to discuss and promote critical consciousness among audiences. New Rockstars, Wisecrack, Let Me Explain, Film Theory, Captain Midnight, The Weekly Planet, and a smattering of other channels populate my YouTube feed with daily content breaking down film, television, games, and other popular culture media. In the Spring of 2018, for a quantitative research course, I set out to systematically investigate how the Wisecrack channel informs audiences to free the masses from the manufactured consent into the patterns of behavior we are indoctrinated to (Bates, 1975; Gramsci, 1971/2012; Reddy & Butler, 2004). That study provided a proof of concept that YouTubers, and by extension, other digital practitioners, offer sophisticated and impactful content to the discourse of film and entertainment media. All the courses, discussions, conferences, and work within my Department of Journalism and Media Communication built my knowledge and researcher positionality for the current investigation of audio critics as I wrote and read and studied popular entertainment through the lens and theory of media industries and critical cultural scholarships.

As an audience member, I have familiarity with the space of audio criticism. I know, anecdotally, that audio critics across the spectrum of professional to amateur say intriguing and thoughtful things about the films reviewed. I hear traces of political commentary, social analysis, and artistic evaluations backed with familiar theories and names: on the level I may hear in a graduate school class and an extra entertaining flair due to the market pressure and need to capture audiences. Also, as an audience member,

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I am sensitive to the considerations of race both on the screens and within the discourse due to my position as a mixed-race, Black woman. My proximity to whiteness and privilege of class and education intersect to influence how I identify with and interpret the films and discourse I encounter. As a scholar, I gravitate towards critical cultural paradigms and foundations of rhetoric that help me understand my position and interactions with power. As a research umbrella, I seek to understand how media agents, like audio critics, contribute to the social and cultural discourse and participatory culture around media.

1.2 Terms and Definitions

You may see unfamiliar terms in this research as the culture of podcast industries continues to emerge and develop. I provide the core terms used to describe the themes, patterns of activity, and behaviors observed in this study below for reference and to ease the navigation for the remaining chapters.

Formatting Notes: I will use consistent formatting to indicate types of content

- *Italics* are used for the names of *audio critics/podcasts*, aligning with writing conventions in other podcast case studies.
- <u>Underline</u> is used for the names of <u>films</u>. You can find a list with the IMDb summaries of each film mentioned in this project in Appendix II. The first instance of the film will also receive a footnote on the page with the summary. Because this study looks at routine behaviors and not individual rhetoric about the film, your knowledge of the movie is not essential to reading the research. This study gives attention to the way audio critics discuss a film rather than the accuracy of the statements.
  - o Example: providing an analysis of capitalism as a theme in the movie vs. explaining the metaphor of capitalism incorrectly for the movie.
- Examples from the audio critics are presented using indentation and italics. The name of the host speaking, the date of the episode, the timestamp where the excerpt begins, and a link to the episode on Spotify are provided.

Host, Month Day, Year, Minutes: Seconds, Link
Transcript of audio.

Audio Critic: the podcast program, not the individual hosts, that center film reviews in the content mix for production. In this study, I will use the term audio critic to identify the sampled podcasts. A host refers to the individual people behind the audio critic brand. Audio Critic describes the podcast because many podcasts rotate hosts, bring in guests, or change whom the individual speakers are while maintaining the brand voice of the podcast. The audio critics are singular entities as a show while the hosts may be plural bodies. This study constructs the difference like the analysis of a movie: the analysis is of the singular film as a whole and understood through the various dialogue from individual characters or performances of individual actors. This study features five audio critics: *Show Me the Meaning, Pop Culture Happy Hour, The Big Picture, Black Girl Film Club,* and *Mostly Nitpicking.*

Legacy-Backed Critic: an audio critic with ties to traditional models for cultural journalism and criticism. The legacy-backed audio critics belong to a network or organization with economic and production systems that resemble recognizable structures to journalism. This study has two legacy-backed critics: *Pop Culture Happy Hour* and *The Big Picture*. Both feature hosts who identify themselves as journalists and belong to large-scale organizations that produce written, video, and audio content across topics.

Crowd-Backed Critic: an audio critic with flexible models not tied to traditional structure or networks of journalism and criticism. The crowd-backed audio critics are built from community support of the listenership rather than an established broader network or organization. Crowd-backed critics represent the evolution of "amateur" podcasts as the crowd-backed programs can grow into large self-contained organizations that produce reliable income for the creators. A crowd-backed critic maintains the foundation of grass-root and communal ties. Crowd-backed critics may demonstrate flexible routines for distribution and production with often less structured oversight and expectations on the work. This study has three crowd-backed critics: *Black Girl Film Club, Mostly Nitpicking,* and *Show Me the Meaning.*

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Storyteller Style: a style of review where a detailed experience of the film in most or all its entirety is used as the vehicle for discourse. Storytellers can be identified by lengthy content that moves through the story beats, typically in order, while expanding on the thoughts and experiences at that moment. An audience listening to a storyteller may walk away knowing what exactly happened in the movie and should expect spoilers. This study features two storytellers: *Black Girl Film Club* and *Mostly Nitpicking.*

Niche: a descriptor for the dominant perspective and discursive purpose to which of the interpretive community can be categorized. The critic will speak through a particular lens of discourse that forms an expertise or interest group. Podcasts represent intimate spaces that help groups connect with others based on interest or knowledge. The formation of niches within the film review interest area reflects the tendency of people to seek out points of view.

Canonical niche: an interest group focused on discussing the artistic qualities of a text within the framework of critical evaluation. The canonical audio critic speaks to its audience about how the mechanisms of storytelling function in the film. For example, how the score punctuates the dynamic of a scene. The canonical niche is a traditional discourse area for film criticism, drawing on conventions of movie review and critical review to evaluate a film and prepare an audience to see and judge its qualities. In this study, *Pop Culture Happy Hour* demonstrated the qualities of a canonical niche in audio criticism.

Technical niche: an interest group that elevates the practitioners and practices of cultural production. The technical niche centers on the creative agents and signifiers of the industry. The technical audio critic often talks about market influences and outcomes for films along with industry accolades and context. For example, how the director's career influences the film and how this work might be considered for an Academy Award. In this study, *The Big Picture* demonstrated the insider niche by emphasizing the many practitioners and practices in film production.

Interpretive niche: a community interested in grounding interpretations of a text in common language and experiences. The interpretive niche explains themes of the movie and centers the symbolic interactions between text and viewer. The audio critic forming an interpretive niche offers critical or

intellectual discourses about the film in accessible ways that invite the audience into the discussion—for example, explaining how a film represents nostalgia and what that means within society. The interpretive niche holds potential for critical consciousness-raising within the community. In this study, most critics blended elements of the interpretive niche by providing thoughtful yet entertaining content. *Black Girl Film Club* and *Show Me the Meaning* demonstrated the most consistent and wholistic framing of the interpretive niche by offering common language explanations of industry jargon, theory, and evaluations of the films.

Affective niche: an interest group that expresses an experience with the text. The affective niche places the thoughts and feelings of the viewer in relation to the film. The affective niche centers the thoughts, questions, and emotions that the text provoked. For example, how a film was confusing and left questions about plot holes. The affective niche represents an entertainment-focused experience for listeners; however, the affective niche does not mean the discourse is inherently shallow or lacking in analysis. This niche is simply more concerned with shared experience in relation to a film. With the affective niche, which was demonstrated by *Mostly Nitpicking*, the interpretive community seeks to unpack thoughts, questions, and emotions that the film provoked with others.

Screening Report: descriptions of shots and scenes to drive the primary discussions. In this study, screening reports are adapted to the audio medium by critics verbally explaining and painting a visual story for the listener of the scenes to set up a conversation or to exemplify a point. At times, audio critics could also provide audio snippets of the film so the audience can hear the scene in combination with the hosts describing the visual impact.

Movie Review: summaries of plot and context with recommendations for the audience. In this study, movie reviews were coded when most of the conversation was centering on a basic plot summary and including production context for the audience. Most critics provided a form of movie review through the hosts' initial impressions and gave the audience a recommendation on the film.

Theoretical Review: arguments about cinematic representation to explain complex socio-political structures. In this study, theoretical reviews were less common as a primary descriptor for the

entire conversation. Instead, many critics provide short topics of discussion that resembled a theoretical review, such as unpacking one scene that held socio-political salience. Audio critics within the Interpretive niche tended to conduct more theoretical reviews than other niches of discourse.

Critical Review: deconstruction of narrative and production choices to reveal nuance in cinematic storytelling. In this study, the critical review was common as the conversations explained artistic and plot choices to the audience to evaluate the overall text.

Logic Interrogation: interrogation of the internal logic structures and continuity in cinematic storytelling. The logic interrogation represents an emerging genre of discourse from this study as audio critics, particularly within the affective niche, identified questions around the narrative. Those questions ranged from character motivations to the physics of the world to what the writers may have been attempting to convey. The logic interrogation holds potential for future exploration and research as a way new media communities speak about film.

News and Culture Review: providing updates and context on current events related to art and industry. The discourse around news and culture included industry-specific events, such as the Warner Bros. Pictures and HBOMax streaming partnership, and larger cultural news like COVID-19's impact on the hosts. This category emerged as podcasters did not stick exclusively to film reviews as advertised in the podcast descriptions.

Podcast Production Review: reflecting on the content and state of the podcast. The timing of this study led to the emerging production review as most audio critics offered an end-of-year wrap-up and review of its work. If the study had not been conducted in December, the production review might not have been demonstrated. This type of review typically provided conversations on favorite and least favorite films from the year, predictions for the upcoming year, and plans for the audio critics. The production review could be useful for future research on the hosts and the state of the podcast industry as a potentially consistent benchmark and practice.

Content Rank and Review: ranking sets of similar content or texts. This type of review quickly discussed numerous films within a single episode, typically grouped by a director, actor, or genre.

1.3   Research Summary

Podcasting reflects a cultural phenomenon demonstrated by edited books in recent years, showing the breadth of potential inquiry. Llinares, Fox, and Berry (2018) call for research to focus on the "vast spectrum of podcast culture, its forms and contexts, the reasons they are made, why they are listened to, and the complexity and diversity of their impact" in their introduction to our "new aural culture" of podcasting (pg. 6). This study explores the forms and contexts of film review podcasts and contributes frameworks for classifying critics by niche and genre. Similarly, Spinelli and Dann (2019) call for a "more robust culture of review and analysis of specific podcasts (the audio and the relationships)" to offer insights on the medium (pg. 16). Again, this study contributes to the need for close examination of podcast communities and offers four collective routines of activity that can be studied through a field construct to understand agents in the medium.

The sample included self-funded projects and underwritten networks, bases of 1,000 to 40,000 Twitter followers, and diversity within the hosts' potential perspectives (race, geographic location, gender, sexuality). I narrowed down the vast options for film podcasts by focusing on the consistency of production, descriptions of content (staying in line with film reviews and an indication of purpose), and presence on Twitter. I looked for a podcast that theoretically aligned with the schools of film criticism in the field. Ultimately, the theory for the Schools of Criticism, built primarily around written criticism, did not describe the activities of the audio critics neatly; however, the sample did produce four distinct niches of discourse and provided organizational diversity.

- *Show Me the Meaning* (@wisecrack) is part of the Wisecrack network, producing content for YouTube and several popular culture podcasts. The *Show Me the Meaning* panel rotates through Wisecrack staff "as they dive into the deeper meaning and cultural significance of the most, and least, iconic movies of our age." It posts weekly with episodes around 60 minutes and have 23,000+ Twitter followers. Wisecrack is funded through crowd-funding and sponsorships.
- *Pop Culture Happy Hour* (@pchh) represents a more traditionally legitimate review source with cultural and economic capital connected to National Public Radio (NPR). The podcast features a

rotating panel of critics and journalists led by Linda Holmes and is described as a "fun and freewheeling chat about the latest movies…" *Pop Culture Happy Hour* publishes content daily for 15 to 30 minutes and has 40,000+ followers on Twitter.

- *The Big Picture* (@TheBigPic) is part of The Ringer Network for sports and entertainment news. The podcast features a rotating panel of media writers and practitioners led by the Ringer Network's Editor-in-Chief, Sean Fennessey. Sean "sits down with Hollywood's biggest filmmakers, breaks down the latest industry trends, handicaps the upcoming Oscars race, and reviews new films with Ringer colleagues…" *The Big Picture* publishes content several times a week, ranging from 60 to 120 minutes for a community of 22,000+ Twitter followers.

- *Black Girl Film Club* (@blckgirlfilmclub) represents a site of emerging legitimacy as a review source of small cultural capital with 1,000+ Twitter followers. The hosts, Ashley Ayer and Britney Brinson, "*analyze movies and the film industry from their unique, and often underrepresented, point of view*." The episodes range from 90 to 120+ minutes every other week.

- *Mostly Nitpicking* (@nitpickingpod) also represents a site of emerging audience and legitimacy as it "*analyzes pop culture by looking exclusively at the details.*" The hosts, Matthew Kelly (known as Nando), DJ Chapman, and Chris Diggins, possess legitimizing capital from other media products: Nando runs the YouTube channel, NandoVMovies, with 200,000+ subscribers and Diggins and DJ write content for thepopbreak.com. *Mostly Nitpicking* has 3,200+ followers on Twitter and releases once a week for 60 to 120 minutes.

The study reflects standards of qualitative research practices to explore an understudied and emerging phenomenon at the intersection of film criticism, podcast economies, and participatory culture. The research was grounded in a media sociology framework to consider the intersections and influence of individual, organizational, and institutional behaviors (Shoemaker & Reese, 2014). A significant aspect in considering the intersections of influences on culture remains the attention to racial formation and identity discourse in society (Omi & Winant, 2015; see also Butler, 2001; Goldberg, 2009; hooks, 2014; Rothstein, 2017). This qualitative study used genre analysis of the podcast activities and observations of

the Twitter community to unpack influences and answer three research questions about podcast positionality and contributions based on the consistent routines observed at the meso-level of collective action for the group. The data collection consisted of listening to the episodes from each critic with fieldnotes that were then entered into the codebook for closer analysis. I also participated in the Twitter community by lurking on the interactions. An API (automated program interface) pulled all the tweets sent from the audio critic brand accounts during the sampling period, which were categorized by function in the codebook. The analytical method considered the communication events and activities that form discourse and genres as outlined by Fairclough (2003). The analysis occurred while data was being collected and patterns emerged, with additional analysis occurring during the writing stages as reflections were made. A color-coding scheme for the common activities and many pivot tables on the categorized data were used to visualize the patterns of discourse and collective activities. The sites, the episodes, and the fieldnotes were returned to often and throughout the analysis and writing process to ensure accuracy, consistency, and meaningful observations of the collective activities of the audio critics in this sample.

I approached this research with questions about how podcasters review films, interact with the audience, and contribute to film and media discourse which required a qualitative and open method to answer. The ethnographic approach with five case studies allowed me to follow the paths of activities from the audio critics where little literature on the routines of film reviewers in podcast spaces exists. Through the analysis process, I brought literature on film writing and critique cultures (Corrigan, 2015; McWhirter, 2016), podcast analyses (Llinares, Fox, & Berry, 2018; Spinelli & Dann, 2019), patterns of discourse and production activities (Fairclough, 2003) and a framework of media sociology (Shoemaker & Reese, 2014) together to explain the observed behaviors. This study engages with over 55 hours of conversation and 204 tweets to recognize the meso-level patterns of the collective group without getting lost in the data of individuals (Kozinets, 2010). Therefore, the analysis and examples are not assessments of the quality of review discourse but instead indicators of how audio critics operate and frame discourse for films. Chapter 2 on the Methods and Research Process describes the research questions, the procedures, and the sample in more detail.

The observations of *Show Me the Meaning*, *Pop Culture Happy Hour*, *The Big Picture*, *Mostly Nitpicking*, and *Black Girl Film Club* generated patterns of discourse across the sample. Each case was purposefully selected based on the audience size, the structure with national networks and 'amateur' creators, and the alignment to a traditional School of Criticism. McWhirter's qualitative content analyses and interviews with film critics who write for newspapers, websites, and blogs provided structure for the initial sampling. Chapter 2, in the section explaining the sample, unpacks the Schools of Criticism in detail. The actual routines and activities of the audio critics did not align well with the way McWhirter described the "critical manifesto (how they operate in the sphere of film criticism at base level)" for the schools of criticism, however (2016, location 1344/4850). The discourses simultaneously fit into multiple schools, which McWhirter recognized as a potential outcome, while not really embodying the qualities of any. Audio forms can cover far more topics with an inherent intimacy and personalized aspect compared to writing, so a new framework to describe overarching conversation points of view emerged. The discourses from the audio critics fit into interpretative, canonical, technical, and affective niches that can be used across many forms of podcast-based art and culture evaluations. Chapter 3 offers a case study analysis with examples of how the niches sound and directly compares coverage of Wonder Woman 1984 across the four niches to better grasp the similar structures with discursive differences.

Chapter 4 offers examples and analysis of how the critics behaved as a collective, pointing towards the institution-level influences and a field of practice (Shoemaker & Reese, 2014). Each critic consistently followed similar branding behaviors to open the episodes, provided first impressions, used a synopsis to set up the conversation, and followed recognizable genres of film criticism. The first impressions and synopsis aligned closely to the niche of discourse the audio critic facilitated. These consistent production and discursive routines, if evident across larger sample sizes of audio critics, could provide structures for predicting the niches of critics and anchor points for scholarship to further situate the discourses produced as podcast cultures continue to formalize.

And lastly, the critics used communication technologies and the participation of the audience in interactive ways. Some used live streaming tools or played voicemails from the audience to integrate the

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community directly into the discourse. They also presented a public forum through social media platforms, primarily Twitter, though with less interaction and more functions for publicity and information sharing. Chapter 3 on the case study analyses provides breakdowns of how the audio critics used the public forum tools as well as the influence of economic factors on the community relations. In this sample, three of the five received external sponsorships and funding with advertising breaks in line with broadcast patterns. The sponsorship deals also illuminated some of the imagination around whom is believed to listen and support the work.

The content and examples from Chapters 3 and 4 provided the information needed to respond to the overarching question of this study: how do we situate audio critics within media discourse? The response is through the niches of discourse with attention to the genres the audio critics create and the ways they interact with the communities. Chapter 5 presents reviews and theoretical summaries of the data and findings that answer the research questions more specifically. Overall, Chapter 5 will answer the questions succinctly, while Chapters 3 and 4 provide the foundations, though textual examples, that support the theory and response at the end of the dissertation.

CHAPTER 2.   METHODS AND THE RESEARCH PROCESS

Stories offer people mechanisms to process, remember, and relate to events within society. Traditions of storytelling—in books, on screens, and through headphones—remain pillars of social life and reflect an interdisciplinary space to situate the methods of this research case. Subfields of communication research for storytelling, particularly qualitative work, ask how humans integrate technology into the performance of identity and relationship-building in adapting to the affordances of new media (Lindlof & Taylor, 2019). I draw from the communication subfields of media sociology and narrative studies to unpack how stories about films are told through podcasts and what influences exist on the discourses produced.

This study used an ethnographic process to explore several layers of data and analysis through the theoretical frameworks of media sociology and narrative studies. While in-depth and flexible, the scope of the study focused on the aspects of activity (how they structured conversation), social relations (how they engaged with the audience), and technology (how they produced the content) across the individual, organizational, and institutional levels of media sociology analysis (Fairclough, 2003; Shoemaker & Reese, 2014; Young, 2004). Field notes and a flexibly structured codebook were used to organize the observations, with narrative studies couched in discourse analysis as the theoretical framework. The codebook outlined the definition, with recalibration as new data emerged, for each aspect of discourse under investigation. For example, the industry evaluation for the discourse was a topic of conversation used primarily to focus on the systems of production culture in film. Likewise, an engagement code for a tweet was defined by a call or response for audience participation as a way the audio critics engender support and communicate with the audience on Twitter. Each item in the codebook will be explained in the Data Description section of this chapter, and the codebook is available in Appendix I. At the same time as I categorized the aspects of discourse through the codebook, I contextualized my experiences with the podcast communities through a lens of persona studies and media sociology, which helped me

identify the influences exerting pressure on the discourse. The intensive and in-depth exploration of five theoretically selected case studies, chosen for the marketed alignment with the traditional Schools of Criticism (McWhirter, 2016), spanned December of 2020 through early 2021 with research discoveries at the individual level of analysis (the audio critics' behaviors) through institutional levels of analysis that build theory on the potential habitus for an emerging field of production culture. Chapter 3 provides the case study analysis to explore the individual routines and influences on each audio critic's situation, which Chapter 4 explores the higher-order structures that indicate a growing field of film discourse in the entertainment media ecosystem. This chapter outlines the research questions, analytical theory and framework, and the data descriptions for the study.

2.1 Research Questions

The big question under investigation through this ethnographic process was how to situate podcasters into the media ecosystem as film critics. The line between those who are and those who are not critics has grown vague since the explosion of new media technologies that amplify the voices of non-traditional agents and fragment the audiences into niche communities. While associations and memberships exist for film critics to gain, potentially, more authority and access to films, these entities do not provide accreditation or professional standing (Hurault-Paupe, 2015). Without a certifying board or definitive marker of legitimization, audio critics, who are often grassroots actors, can embody the routines of the field and legitimize themselves with the audience, mirroring tensions over legitimacy and accepted routines for journalism at large (Carlson, 2015). The research questions I respond to tease out podcast positionality and contribution nuances based on the consistent routines observed across the collective group.

- **Where do audio critics contribute to the ecosystem of networked content within the institution of entertainment media?**
  - a. *How can scholars classify audio critics to identify their positions within the media ecosystem?*

- **How do audio critics engender social relations to form interpretive communities around their podcasts?**

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a. *How does the infrastructure of communication technologies influence the discourse within the audience communities?*
b. *How do organizational factors visibly influence the routines of audio critics?*
c. *How does the fiscal dynamic between audio critics and the audience visibly influence the routines?*

- **How do the discursive activities of audio critics intersect with generic forms of film criticism?**
  a. *To what extent do audio critics follow the legacy routines of film criticism?*
  b. *Which discursive activities form a habitus for audio criticism as a media field of practice?*

To answer the research questions about practices of audio criticism, a qualitative approach to gather rich, meaningful data was appropriate: an ethnographic inquiry to document and theorize on the routine actions of five purposefully selected podcasts. I experienced the podcasts as both audience and instrument to identify how audio critics served their audiences, leading to a classification framework for the new medium.

2.1 Theoretical Framework of Analysis

In this section, I explain how the data collection procedures served the research questions grounded in field theory and media sociology to tease out the activities and collective actions of audio critics. The method provided the ability to collect data on the narrative structures in evaluating films, the visible interactions between audio critic and the audiences, and the functions of technology within the space. The use of field theory and media sociology to ground an ethnography allowed me to consider multiple levels of influence while I collected the data and steered me into unforeseen directions as I followed the sample and the influences observed.

Field theory, as a key illuminator of social structures, patterns, and symbolic cultural interactions, is studied through several layers of analysis (Benson & Neveu, 2005). The field of film criticism features guiding influences and forces that act on individual critics' conceptualization of professionalism and roles (Reese & Shoemaker, 2014). This study considered field theory because the audio critics represent a subfield as they followed routines that appear to come from higher-level forces and bound the roles and practices of the actors. The phenomenon of audio film critics runs parallel to media convergence among

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bloggers and journalists during the digital shifts in the news field, a site where Field Theory has been effective in understanding collective behaviors. Audio critics are establishing themselves as key actors enabled with degrees of autonomy within the larger field of film criticism and can be studied through a theoretical framework that emphasizes multiple variables from individual decisions to macrostructures of society (Shoemaker & Vos, 2009). Thus, studying cultural behaviors of audio film criticism mirrors inquiries on the field among journalists and bloggers of the previous decade.

Additionally, film criticism occurs at the intersection of political economy and cultural studies, requiring a blend of the two theoretical traditions (Jenkins, 2003/2012). The hierarchical model of media sociology offers an appropriate theoretical framework to analyze audio critics because of the attention to the individual, social, institutional, and cultural contexts at play (Bourdieu, 2005; Shoemaker & Reese, 2014). The choices made by audio critics are inherently connected to social obligations from their interpretive communities, institutional factors of production, and cultural influences on their experiences. While structural similarities, reflecting a habitus, emerged in this sample, I observed key differences that relate to individual, organizational, and institutional contexts. Field Theory paired within a hierarchy of media sociology provides explanatory power at those intersections.

Also at the intersection of influence is the interpretive community framework explaining who podcasters are talking to and with. The interpretive community framework provides a unique contribution to investigations of the digital landscape for film criticism by allowing work with narrative analysis into the conversation of film criticism. When looking at film criticism through more traditional genre studies—heavily influenced by structuralist logic—the experience and ritual of the film can be lost. While deconstructing the text itself and centering the underlying rules that build meaning for audiences have strength and utility, the new frontier for entertainment and digital media scholarship must position experience within the epistemology of film criticism. In the post-modern and post-industrial—which also gives way to the post-structuralist analysis of film— the sharing of personal information and knowledge are encouraged to build audience connections. The social practices and routines for engagement with perceived like-minded individuals form the symbolic interactionism useful in film criticism today (Brake,

2012). Entering the landscape through interpretive communities pushes our understanding of the how, the when, and the why audiences experience films and gravitate towards niches of discourse in particular ways. Allowing for questions of experience draws researchers closer to the dynamic and nuanced construction of film narratives and establishes new values in film criticism.

An interpretive community is built on an imagined audience for audio critics. Film critics must consider the technological infrastructure and the market value of various communities in creating and distributing content. The commodification of the imagined audience shapes media streams and leads to further fragmented consumers (Turow, 2005). Imagined audience refers to the mental conceptualization of the people we communicate with (Litt, 2012). Imagined audiences can be constructed and informed by internal desires and needs of the producer and external factors of market share and profitability within the political economy of production. When internal processes inform the audience, the producer may enact social and networking needs. They may also imagine little to no audience while they produce content for themselves (Marwick & boyd, 2011). When market forces inform the audience, producers are seeking to categorize and then seduce people into the most profitable or viable imagined space to then sell them the content or idea (Turow, 2005). Either way, imagined audiences are impacted by both environmental and personal aspects in the online sphere (Litt, 2012). A researcher can deconstruct the imagined audience of a critic to expose the production and consumption routines of content because the imagined audience directly informs what is produced (Brake, 2012). That imagination fuels routines then turns into practice as real people follow the paths of production and distribution. This study asked about those routines that may indicate the imagination of audio criticism and podcast culture.

Routines, such as choosing content based on film releases or monitoring social media for the highly anticipated content, reduce uncertainty for media producers. Audio critics mirrored the routines of bloggers by specializing to find a niche community to reduce the burden of abundance with content (Lowery & Latta, 2008). Looking across audio critic networks for similarities while minding the divergences between each critic supports an understanding of the routine levels of analyses. Each film critic produces and maintains an audience influenced by the niche of discourse present, the medium or

platform (Nieborg & Poell, 2018), and individual characteristics of the critic (Shoemaker & Reese, 2014). The interpretive communities formed at the intersection of these factors illuminates the influence and authority of the film critic as we track how critics produce, grow, and maintain followers. Interpretive communities represent a social situation where actors and parties engage with each other to build and sustain meaning around a cultural artifact (Ross, 2014). The differences in interpretation among community groups can be traced back to the differences in the actors and their experiences that inform the group interactions. Interpretive communities enact forms of habitus shaped and informed by their previous experiences of the world that go on to dictate and inform current and future experiences (Edgar, 2019). Interpretive communities as a framework have been useful in studying how routines of a field, such as journalism, circulate through narrative (Bishop, 2019). The consistent and distinct ways that a given community interprets a film, and thus interpret a social situation illuminate deeper values and meanings for the group.

Drawing on the theoretical framework of field theory with the hierarchy of influences, I considered how audio critics serve audiences through analysis of the genres and interactions enacted. The model provided explanatory power to the ways that audio critics build and maintain interpretive communities within the fragmented market of contemporary film criticism.

2.2 Analytical Method

Following the spirit of ethnographic inquiry, the data were analyzed through multiple methods— sometimes overlapping with the data collection stage. The analytical method rests on the systematic categorization of the data and reflective reporting on themes that emerge during the experience. Both occur "on-site" in the fieldnotes and after data collection as I digitize the fieldnotes for categorization and further analysis. The method of discourse analysis through the narrative interactions and social practices of the network provided insight into the genres that situate audio critics (Fairclough, 2003). Narrative analysis centers the lived experiences of actors and their performances during the phenomenon under investigation to expose dynamics of power, social relations, and meaning (Basset, 2007; Caruthers, Loyce & Friend, 2014; De Fina & Georgakopoulou, 2008; Laaksonen, 2016; Ryan, 2004). Exposing the loci of

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power, the interactions of social relations, and the cultural constructions of meaning are the life-blood of critical cultural studies; therefore, this work to situate emerging actors within a critical cultural ecosystem was well-suited for narrative work and discourse analysis. Keep in mind that this study considered the actions of the collective group at the meso-level rather than analyzing the rhetorical nature of the discourse at the individual level for meaning. The narrative and discourses were considered through the framing rather than the granular quality of the discourse, producing a framework for classifying the types of review in the ecosystem.

As the data was collected, true to the ethnographic form, the analysis occurred as I experienced and took systematic notes and refined through the codebook framework (Kozinets, 2010; Tracey, 2020). I returned to the sites (the podcast episodes and the Twitter threads) often to focus on certain aspects, like genre studies that consider various factors with each listen for podcast classification (Drew, 2017). The process for analysis began with a focused listening of the podcast episode to mark time-stamps where key interactions occur. After listening through the entire episode once, I reflected on the performance and digitized my fieldnotes using the codebook. The completed codebook was used to visualize major themes among the activities of the critics, routines of technologies, and other notable behaviors: all understood and explicated through relevant theory.

The analytical method provided a categorization structure flexible enough for the emergent trends stemming from the immersive experience of living within a narrative. The framework relies on Fairclough's *Textual Analysis for Social Research* with an emphasis on narrative analysis (2003). Narrative analysis provides an understanding of symbolic structures while remaining open to the value in subjective and co-created meaning for producers, consumers, and co-creators of the interactive story (Bassett, 2007; Ryan, 2005). To accomplish the task of a narrative analysis within the theoretical logics, I considered discourse, the words, and the structure of the vocalized story in the podcast, as elements of social events. I focused on how the words created an event and not on the rhetorical purpose of the words: I was not looking at the value or validity of what the critics said—I was looking at the patterns discourse.

The codebook is organized by the timestamp to the nearest 15 seconds. Each preface is categorized by the type: 1=discourse, 2=social/tech interaction, 3=ad/commercial interaction. This coding allows for data visualizations, such as looking only at the commercial interactions to illuminate patterns. Once the preface was coded, a qualitative description was added to help me move between field notes and the codebook. The evaluations were coded through the definitions outlined in the codebook: only the single more prominent or applicable evaluation is selected. The remaining columns for Social Relations and Communication Technology follow the same pattern by selecting the most appropriate definition as outlined in the codebook. The High-Level structure is determined by reviewing the field notes, considering the context of the preface within the episode, and weighing the conversation against the codebook's definitions.

Using this basic structure, I analyzed each conversation turn to map the structure of film engagement within and across the podcast sample. The release date, length in minutes, and title are recorded first. Then, returning to the episode breakdown and field notes, the core purpose and genre of the episode as a whole was recorded using the definitions from the codebook. The number of audience interactions and market integrations, grouped into number ranges, were recorded to inform analysis on the prevalence of interaction.

Production Data					High Level Structure				Aspect of Activity		Aspects of Social Relations			
CaseID	TextID	Release Date	Text Length	Text Title	Backing	Niche	Genre 1	Genre 2	Evaluation	Evaluation 2	Direct Submission	Public Forum	Invitation	Acknowledge
bkgirlfilmclub	BGFC01	Monday, November 30, 2020	134.00	Natural Born Killers (1994)	Crowd-Backed	Interpretive	Screening Report	Theoretical Review	Aesthetic	Socio-Political	0		0 1 to 2	7+
pchh	x1PCHH	Tuesday, December 1, 2020	28	BTS	Legacy-Backed	Canonical	News and Culture Review	Content Rank and Review	Socio-Political	Industry	0		0 1 to 2	1 to 2
thebigpic	x1TBP	Tuesday, December 1, 2020	92	Mank Week: The Importance of Citizen Kane and Orsen Welles	Legacy-Backed	Technical	News and Culture Review	Theoretical Review	Industry	Aesthetic	0		0	0 3 to 4
pchh	PCHH01	Wednesday, December 2, 2020	23	2020 Christmas Movies and TV: Happiest Season, Hallmark, and More	Legacy-Backed	Canonical	Content Rank and Review	Movie Review	Socio-Political	Aesthetic	0		0 1 to 2	1 to 2
thebigpic	x2TBP	Wednesday, December 2, 2020	39	Emergency Pod: Did Movie Theaters Just Die	Legacy-Backed	Technical	News and Culture Review	Podcast Production Review	Industry	Contextual	0		0	0 1 to 2
pchh	PCHH02	Thursday, December 3, 2020	24	Mank and What's Making Us Happy	Legacy-Backed	Canonical	Movie Review	Critical Review	Aesthetic	Entertainment	0		0 1 to 2	0
nitpickingpod	MNP01	Friday, December 4, 2020	177	Jiu Jitsu	Crowd-Backed	Affective	Logic Interrogation	Screening Report	Roast	Entertainment	0 1 to 2	1 to 2	1 to 2	
thebigpic	TBP01	Friday, December 4, 2020	88	Mank is Here. Does David Fincher's Movie Live Up	Legacy-Backed	Technical	Critical Review	News and Culture Review	Industry	Aesthetic	0		0 1 to 2	1 to 2
wisecrack	SMTM01	Friday, December 4, 2020	62	Ferris Bueller's Day Off (Directed by John Huges)-American Psycho Jr.	Crowd-Backed	Interpretive	Critical Review	Theoretical Review	Socio-Political	Aesthetic	1 to 2	1 to 2	1 to 2	1 to 2
pchh	PCHH03	Sunday, December 6, 2020	22	Scott Pilgrim Vs. the World	Legacy-Backed	Canonical	Critical Review	Screening Report	Aesthetic	Socio-Political	0		0 1 to 2	1 to 2
pchh	x2PCHH	Monday, December 7, 2020	25	Mariah Carey	Legacy-Backed	Canonical	Content Rank and Review	News and Culture Review	Aesthetic	Industry	0		0 1 to 2	0
pchh	x3PCHH	Tuesday, December 8, 2020	17	Saved by the Bell	Legacy-Backed	Canonical	Movie Review	Critical Review	Aesthetic	Socio-Political	0		0 1 to 2	0
thebigpic	x3TBP	Tuesday, December 8, 2020	91	Top 5 Movies of 2020	Legacy-Backed	Technical	Content Rank and Review	Critical Review	Industry	Aesthetic	0		0	0 3 to 4
pchh	x4PCHH	Wednesday, December 9, 2020	15	Bad Bunny	Legacy-Backed	Canonical	Content Rank and Review	Critical Review	Aesthetic	Socio-Political	0		0 1 to 2	0
pchh	PCHH04	Thursday, December 10, 2020	29	The Prom and What's Making Us Happy	Legacy-Backed	Canonical	Movie Review	Critical Review	Aesthetic	Socio-Political	0		0 1 to 2	0
thebigpic	TBP02	Thursday, December 10, 2020	99	The Steven Soderbergh Rankings: Featuring Steven Soderbergh	Legacy-Backed	Technical	Movie Review	News and Culture Review	Industry	Contextual	0		0	0 1 to 2
wisecrack	SMTM02	Friday, December 11, 2020	62	Ready Player One (Directed by Steven Spielborg)-Empty Nostalgia or Fitting Fiction	Crowd-Backed	Interpretive	Theoretical Review	Critical Review	Socio-Political	Aesthetic	1 to 2	1 to 2	1 to 2	1 to 2
pchh	xSPCHH	Sunday, December 13, 2020	9	2020 Best Books: Realistic Fiction	Legacy-Backed	Canonical	Content Rank and Review	Critical Review	Aesthetic	Industry	0		0 1 to 2	0
pchh	x6PCHH	Monday, December 14, 2020	17	Taylor Swifts Evermore	Legacy-Backed	Canonical	Critical Review	Content Rank and Review	Aesthetic	Industry	0		0 1 to 2	0

Figure 1:Example from the Codebook of Text Classifications

The Twitter data was the most straightforward to analyze as each tweet was recorded and considered through the engagement data and function. The function was selected based on the most

appropriate definition from the codebook. The qualitative work of Twitter came into play to understand how the audio critics interacted with the community and how the niches were reflected in the content.

Account	Style	Date	Day	Week	Likes	Retweets	Replies	Tweet Content	Function of Tweet	Tweet Status
blkgirlfilmclub	Story Teller	11/30/2020 15:40	Monday	1	0	26	0	RT @SuperYakiStuff: Happy birthday Gael García Bernal, thank you for being alive for 42 years. https://t.co/Jh3nsSGLqn	General	Retweet
blkgirlfilmclub	Story Teller	11/30/2020 16:10	Monday	1	2	1	0	We're back with more Bonnie and Clyde tropes along with Coca-Cola polar bears, offensive Patti Smith songs, and RDJ's Australian accent. Listen to our latest episode on Natural Born Killers (1994) now! https://t.co/mipXuIiIMH	Publicity	Original
pchh	Traditional	11/30/2020 17:22	Monday	1	16	3	1	Hark back with us, won't you, to our discussion of THE MANDALORIAN w/Glen, @mallory_yu @ayesharascoe and @RunDMR , because This Is The Way. https://t.co/YcFFF1U2yI	Publicity	Original
TheBigPic	Traditional	11/30/2020 21:22	Monday	1	51	3	1	RT @aherman2006: h*rp*r bad https://t.co/Ud P6Zmhbr9	Show Topics	Retweet
pchh	Traditional	12/1/2020 15:01	Tuesday	1	7	1	0	2020's been a hard year, and we understand that you might not be in the same position to give. But if it's within your means, know that your donation fuels the work we -- and NPR -- are doing to make this year and the years that follow a little better, and a little brighter. https://t.co/KDxkPifXwg	Merchandising	Original
pchh	Traditional	12/1/2020 15:01	Tuesday	1	53	8	0	We've made big changes this year. More episodes, more voices, more topics. We couldn't have done it without your support -- last year you showed NPR that you valued PCHH by donating to your local station through this link: ¦ https://t.co/R2eq6F9b8E	Merchandising	Original
pchh	Traditional	12/1/2020 15:01	Tuesday	1	27	2	0	Also? Not for nothing? The only thing that will make Glen's desiccated husk of a heart grow three sizes this holiday season is the ability to gloat that PCHH crushed other NPR podcasts under its stylish but affordable bootheel. https://t.co/m6bmekvTGG	Merchandising	Original
TheBigPic	Traditional	12/1/2020 18:48	Tuesday	1	29	2	3	It's 'Mank' week! We're talking all things 'Citizen Kane,' Orson Wells, and classic Hollywood with @brofromanother and @ChrisRyan77 . ¦ https://t.co/8nOiO9O5xt	Publicity	Original
TheBigPic	Traditional	12/1/2020 18:48	Tuesday	1	151	20	12	RT @SeanFennessey: Before you watch MANK, there are a few things you should know. @akdobbins, @ChrisRyan77, @brofromanother, and me discuss¦	Publicity	Retweet
TheBigPic	Traditional	12/1/2020 18:48	Tuesday	1	55	3	1	RT @brofromanother: Talked about Orson Welles, CITIZEN KANE, Pauline Kael, MANK, and my new book on ä@@TheBigPicä© https://t.co/5vNothhV9U	Publicity	Retweet

Figure 2: Example from Codebook of Twitter Classification

Media sociology as a theoretical framework presents researchers with the capacity to examine multiple layers of influence acting in a given context. The layers of analysis flow through the individual actions, which are socialized through habitualized routines of practice and informed by the institutional and ideological superstructures at play (Shoemaker & Reese, 2014). Within narrative analysis, the attention to the institutional features that shape social actions (Georgakopoulou, 2015) parallel the organizational and institutional influences that shape routines for actors in a field. The ways that communicative actions and themes emerge from a narrative analysis (Laaksonen, 2016) provide a useful form of analysis to uncover how the collective group of podcasters behave in the given sociological instance. And the ontology of narrative analysis that understands stories as contingent and mutable in the continual process of meaning-making (Bassett, 2007) frames the epistemology of media sociology in that researcher knowledge of a phenomenon is generated through the dynamic interactions of actors in the field. Understanding the sociology of a media field requires a method framework that values flexible, dynamic, and—most importantly—socially created data for analysis. The emphasis in narrative analysis to capture and unpack the themes and spheres of influential interactions on the subjects' construction of a story represents an extension to expectations for media sociological inquiry.

A podcast-based media critical project is well-suited for narrative analysis as symbolic structures of discourse must be interpreted in context with the subjective and co-created meanings of the critics and the interpretive communities. The project must look for how the critics tell the story of the experiences with the narrative (watching the film) to identify the social practices, routines, and interactional dynamics at play (De Fina & Georgakopoulou, 2008). The narrative analysis provides the framework to collect many forms of data not typically considered within the system of knowledge from the podcast-based media critics and the digital interactions (Caruthers, Loyce & Friend, 2014). And finally, the narrative analysis includes the interactivity and digital influences wrapped up in the symbolic creation of reality for producers, consumers, and co-creators of the story (Bassett, 2007; Ryan, 2005). Extending the method into podcast-based criticism represents a clear and focused approach to a fuzzy and unpredictable space.

2.3 Data Collection

To answer the research questions anchored within *how to situate audio critics within the ecosystem of media discourse,* a digital ethnography— a method framework that merges data collection and the analysis while keeping the context intact—was appropriate. The literature on podcasts intersecting with critical cultural discourses has paid more attention to radio dramas, history/educational topics, and counter publics (Bottomley, 2015; Linares, Fox & Berry, 2018; Spinelli & Dann, 2019); therefore, this study explored an emerging phenomenon by co-existing with the community interactions and following the constructions of culture with flexibility. An ethnography allows researchers to understand the community's cultural information more deeply while following the medium through the shifts and flows more readily (Kozinets, 2010; Rogers, 2013). Ethnographies "utilize videos, images, and sounds as well as textual data," which aligns well with the study of podcasts [sounds] and additional artifacts of production [images and textual data] (Costello, McDermott & Wallace, 2017, p. 9). Data-rich observations of digital communities have been helpful in emerging contexts such as vloggers on YouTube (Snelson, 2015; García-Rapp, 2018), fashion influencers on Instagram (Martensen, Brockenhuus-Schack & Zahid, 2018), and industry-specific practices on Twitter (Chretien, et. al, 2015; Komorowski, Huu &

Deligiannis, 2018) where routines, relationships, and communicative patterns are emerging within niche topic spaces.

The data collection occurred in several continual and flexible stages: 1) active listening with field notes, 2) exploring the content posted to Twitter and other platforms with field notes, and 3) returning to the sites to categorize my notes using the codebook. The purpose of the study was to situate audio critics within the field as they engage with films and their audiences. As such, I listened and engaged carefully—but enjoyably—to embody an audience member, and then I used the codebook for systematic collection/analysis. As I wrote this final analysis and dissertation document, I returned to my reflexive field notes, data insights from coding, and lived experiences as a member of the imagined audience to ultimately see how we might categorize and construct audio criticism within a field. Part of reflecting on the lived experiences and the field of criticism included considering the pandemic years of 2020-2021+.

The COVID-19 pandemic reflected a core influence on the time and space the interactions of audio critics occurred for this study. I, as the researcher, am living and surviving through an incredibly disruptive time, and the ethnographic approach allowed space to hear how the hosts, the people behind the audio critic podcasts, were also surviving the pandemic. As I collected and analyzed the data, news continued to evolve around COVID-19, and the audio critics often responded to those news items. Tracey (2020) emphasizes that "understanding these issues requires at least some real-time interactions" (p. 137), so as a digital ethnographer, I embodied that of a *play participant* that experiences the community as both audience and researcher to reflect on my subjective experiences of the environment. Without the reflexivity to empathize with their feelings and response and the contextual framing, the discourse analysis risked erasing the underlying impacts of COVID from the time and space this sample existed within. Additionally, work in podcast spaces reflects an emerging field where rich case studies to uncover activities and themes contribute a high amount of value and knowledge (Llinares, Fox & Berry, 2018; Spinelli & Dann, 2019). The research process of experiential data collection during December and January, followed by close [re]readings to analyze the episodes, allowed me to engage with the content and context as both an audience and researcher.

In short, ethnographic inquiry enabled me to "follow the medium," that is, to study an ephemeral, unstable space as it unfolds, moves, and changes, much like a sociologist in the field (Rogers, 2013, p. 24). Doing so led me to YouTube videos, Patreon posts, and other social media explorations: most of the content I did not foresee but opened my eyes to the creative ways audio critics expand the digital footprint within the media ecosystem. This flexible and rich method provided the data and exploration to posit that a framework of roles, the macro-level purpose of the audio critic in the ecosystem, and niches on the micro-level that frame the conversations observed in this case study could be useful to classify new media critics across art forms.

2.3.1 Procedures of Collection

Two processes for data were used to experience and analyze the content.

1. Map the discourse structure with Aspects of Activity and Aspects of Social Relations, including economic influences from market integrations, through experiential and close readings of the texts (podcast episodes)

2. Experience the supplemental artifacts of the individuals and organizations with Aspects of Technology at the focus through flexible readings of associated content (i.e., Twitter, Instagram, YouTube)

The process for data collection in Process 1 involved listening to each podcast while taking systematic and reflexive fieldnotes; the fieldnotes were then entered into a spreadsheet following a flexible codebook for systematic analysis. New categories emerged, and others shifted in how the aspect should be defined as data was collected. The fieldnotes and codebook provided the framework to visualize consistent routines in the podcast structure and track the advertisements and sponsorships present in the episodes. While the codebook assisted in my documentation of trends, the reflexive practice of participating and taking detailed field notes led my responses to the research questions posed and additional questions for future scholarship.

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The process for data collection in Process 2 involved following along each evening with Twitter activity through my curated "list" of my sample cases that placed all their content into a single feed for observation, lurking through Discord servers and Patreons[3] maintained by the organizations, and watching YouTube videos related to the audio critics. Process 2 was more flexible as I took field notes on the experience and emerging artifacts that inform where and how to situate audio critics in the media ecosystem. Many of the hosts associated with audio critics under investigation appear and contribute across different platforms and spaces for media discourse; however, the audio critic brands did appear to exist primarily, if not exclusively, within podcast spaces. The combination of tracked listening and interacting with additional media provided a rich experience of each case and appropriate context to answer the research questions.

The digital fieldwork to observe and engage with the communities of practice occurred from *November 29, 2020-January 4, 2021*. Three sample cases, which had fewer total episodes, posted content on January 15 and January 22 that I also captured to help balance the sample. This period represents a typical instance sampling (Tracey, 2020), appropriate to explore the average behaviors of audio critics because the COVID-19 pandemic pushed the Academy Awards for 2021 back to April. While the winter period would normally reflect a critical instance with film festivals and award season, the winter of 2020 was a continuation of the new normal under COVID-19, with the state of life and industry remaining like the rest of the year. Basically, the cultural practices for quarantining persisted through the winter in the generally same fashion as previous months. Sampling over this period in the winter of 2020/2021 does offer the potential to investigate this critical period once media production and award cycles return to pre-COVID schedules for insight into the differences of 2019, 2020, 2021, 2022 critic routines. I did loosely monitor the Academy Award period because it occurred as I was writing through the analysis of the case studies. I provide insight into the potential for future research on this critical sampling period in Appendix III.

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[3] To access these items, I did contribute monetary funds: Wisecrack (Show Me the Meaning), $10; NandoVMovies (Mostly Nitpicking), $5.

During the sampling period, all the podcast content provided by the audio critics was consumed with field notes taken; however, only podcast episodes with explicit film reviews were coded with the codebook spreadsheet for tracking the discursive events for criticism. The final sample included **47 audio podcast** episodes totaling **3,350 minutes of content (55.8 hours).** The Twitter API, which pulled the text and engagement data from Tweets and Retweets from the official audio critic brand accounts, **furnished 204 Tweets**. While in the field, I created a Twitter list with the official podcast brand accounts and the individual host accounts to deliver their content to my feed, sorted by Most Recent First. I observed Twitter each evening, around 8 pm. The Twitter API pull allowed me to categorize the Twitter activity based on function for the brand, such as publicity (Spinelli & Dann, 2019), while the experiential Twitter data allowed me to observe the threads of discourse and perception of the niche communities. The experiential Twitter process also provided me the opportunity to read and watch the links provided by the audio critics, which led me to discoveries such as *Show Me the Meaning* streaming its podcast episodes live on YouTube several days prior to the episodes being released on Spotify.

Field notes served as the primary vehicle where the instrument (me) stored the collected data. The field notes, following the tenants of rigorous ethnographic study, had sections for both systematic and reflexive data capture. The notes captured the interactional processes at play and my reflections on subtexts within the communicative experience (Kozinets, 2010; Tracey, 2020). The notebook was divided into weekly summaries, daily notes, and episodes.
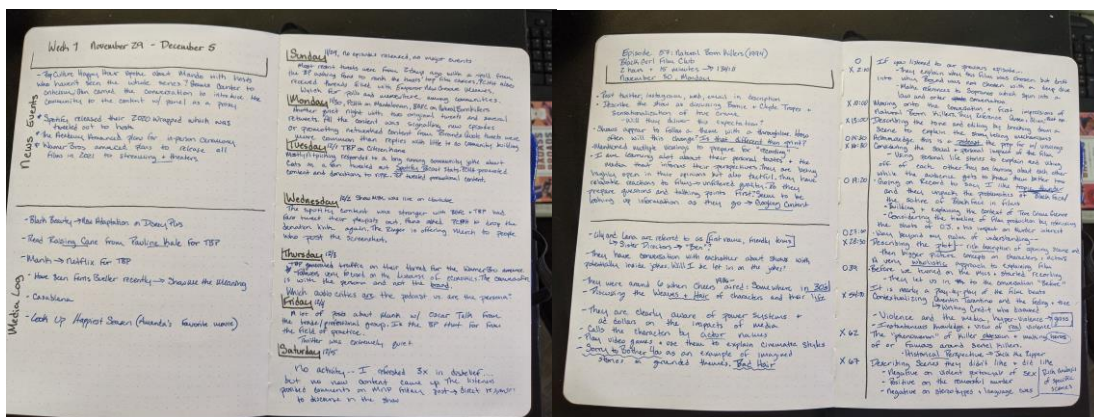

Figure 3: Photo of Researcher Field Notes

Most of the journal is filled with my episode notes where I dedicated one page to my own reactions and thoughts while listening as an audience member and the other pages for noting the time stamps of conversation turns, marketing events, and social interactions. The codebook translated my field notes, with close [re]readings of marked timestamps for the episodes, into appropriate categories. Below is a codebook snippet with episode 1 from *Black Girl Film Club* on <u>Natural Born Killers</u>[4], the same episode shown in Figure 1 with the fieldnotes. Each preface, or turn-in topic, was noted with a number to symbolize the type of preface with summaries of my field notes in the descriptions. I then categorized that conversation topic in terms of activity, interaction, or market integration. I also color-coded the notes, which was an emerging process during analysis, to visualize the activities that seemed to appear

| | | | | | | Aspects of Activity | | Aspects of Communication Technology | |
CaseID	Text ID	Time Stamps	Style	Backing	Preface	Topic Description	Evaluation	Audience Interaction	Market Integration
blkgirlfilmclub	BGFC01	0.00	Story Teller	Crowd-Backed	2	Reference to episode library	Contextual	Acknowledgement	N/A
blkgirlfilmclub	BGFC01	2.00	Story Teller	Crowd-Backed	1	Explain why the film was chosen above other options	Entertainment	N/A	N/A
blkgirlfilmclub	BGFC01	10.00	Story Teller	Crowd-Backed	1	First Impressions of the film	Entertainment	N/A	N/A
blkgirlfilmclub	BGFC01	13.00	Story Teller	Crowd-Backed	1	Decribe the tone and story telling mechanisms in specific scenes	Aesthetic	N/A	N/A
blkgirlfilmclub	BGFC01	14.30	Story Teller	Crowd-Backed	2	Acknowledge how they prep notes and thoughts when viewing	Industry	Acknowledgement	N/A
blkgirlfilmclub	BGFC01	16.30	Story Teller	Crowd-Backed	1	Consider the social and personal impact of the film in their lives	Entertainment	N/A	N/A
blkgirlfilmclub	BGFC01	19.30	Story Teller	Crowd-Backed	2	Cite themselves as "on record" providing thoughts and takes (tropic thunder takes)	Socio-Political	Acknowledgement	N/A
blkgirlfilmclub	BGFC01	20.00	Story Teller	Crowd-Backed	1	Unpacking genre and context for blackface/ black films and truecrime/violence	Socio-Political	N/A	N/A
blkgirlfilmclub	BGFC01	28.30	Story Teller	Crowd-Backed	1	Provide a high-level overview of the plot, characters, and what to expect as an audience with expanded context	Entertainment	N/A	N/A
blkgirlfilmclub	BGFC01	39.00	Story Teller	Crowd-Backed	2	Let us on a conversation "before they turned on the mics" which related to the actress	Contextual	Acknowledgement	N/A
blkgirlfilmclub	BGFC01	42.00	Story Teller	Crowd-Backed	1	Begin series of rich descriptions of the plot sequencing through major beats	Contextual	N/A	N/A
blkgirlfilmclub	BGFC01	54.00	Story Teller	Crowd-Backed	1	Contextualize director with the feeling and tone of the film including theme of hyper-violence	Industry	N/A	N/A
blkgirlfilmclub	BGFC01	62.00	Story Teller	Crowd-Backed	1	Unpacking the phenomenon of killer obsession and serial killers in the public eye	Socio-Political	N/A	N/A
blkgirlfilmclub	BGFC01	67.00	Story Teller	Crowd-Backed	1	Describing scenecs they liked/didn't like with thick descriptions-- themes of violence and stereotypes	Socio-Political	N/A	N/A
blkgirlfilmclub	BGFC01	78.00	Story Teller	Crowd-Backed	1	Back to conversation about the director and production implications	Industry	N/A	N/A
blkgirlfilmclub	BGFC01	82.00	Story Teller	Crowd-Backed	1	Return to rich scene descriptions as vehicle to explain the extended retelling of the story	Contextual	N/A	N/A
blkgirlfilmclub	BGFC01	86.00	Story Teller	Crowd-Backed	2	Relating to the audience through COVID and getting zoned out in the film	Entertainment	Acknowledgement	N/A
blkgirlfilmclub	BGFC01	96.00	Story Teller	Crowd-Backed	2	Provide context on media and cultural references they make	Contextual	Acknowledgement	N/A
blkgirlfilmclub	BGFC01	110.00	Story Teller	Crowd-Backed	1	Final recommendation of the movie and thoughts	Entertainment	N/A	N/A
blkgirlfilmclub	BGFC01	113.00	Story Teller	Crowd-Backed	1	Compare and unpack state of Black narratives and pressures on Black creatives	Industry	N/A	N/A
blkgirlfilmclub	BGFC01	124.00	Story Teller	Crowd-Backed	2	Share tips to the audience for consuming film with sensitivities and warners	Contextual	Acknowledgement	N/A
blkgirlfilmclub	BGFC01	128.00	Story Teller	Crowd-Backed	1	Wrap up with a preview for the rest of December content	Contextual	N/A	N/A
blkgirlfilmclub	BGFC01	129.00	Story Teller	Crowd-Backed	2	Call for interaction because they didn't have any emails that week	Entertainment	Invitation	N/A

frequently. The color-coding became helpful when looking at large sets of data to focus on the collective routines and not the individual data points.

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[4] <u>Natural Born Killers</u>, 1994. *Two victims of traumatized childhoods become lovers and psychopathic serial murderers irresponsibly glorified by the mass media.*

When I analyzed the data, I returned to both my field notes and the actual texts to process the experience and draw conclusions on how to situate audio critics in the media ecosystem.

2.3.2 Description of Data

The data collected in this study are treated as social acts and used to understand the meaning within the social world (Kozinets, 2010). The data are segmented into three aspects: activity, interactions, and technology (Fairclough, 2003). Following the lead of researchers in discourse work, I focused on three types of data that construct the genre of a social event and thus point towards the place of audio critics within the media ecosystem:

1) the aspects of activity from the critics (what they talk about)

   a. noting the prefaces in conversation that mark a change in topic to determine the

Figure 4: Example of Digital Notes with Coding Applied

   evaluation (attitudes towards a topic)

   b. For example, when Britney and Ashley from *Black Girl Film Club* turned its conversation away from the retelling of the scenes it liked and did not like in <u>Natural Born Killers</u> to a discussion of director Oliver Stone's significance to the culture.

2) the aspects of social relations among agents (how they talk to each other)

   a. describing how the critics interact with their peers and audience

   b. For example, when Ashley and Britney directly acknowledge the audience by saying how they prep notes for the episode or invite the audience to share their thoughts and connect.

3) the aspects of communication technologies (what they use to interact)

   a. following the integration of media tools for engagement

   b. For example, *Black Girl Film Club* did not integrate advertising or sponsorships into its <u>Natural Born Killers</u> episode; however, it did use Twitter to promote their episode on November 30, 2020.

The aspects of Activity describe the discursive actions that create a text event—basically how conversations flow and function. The activities illuminate the framing and boundaries within the conversations. Young (2004) notes that "not all kinds of frames turn up in each story, and only four kinds seem to be essential to it: a preface, the beginning and end, and some sort of evaluation" (p. 102). Data collection for each episode systematically noted the preface, how the topic unfolds, and the evaluation of the topic. The preface cues the listeners and the podcast hosts into the context of the conversation as the topics of interest shift. The evaluations function in several ways during storytelling and conversation: "management of attitudes, interest, and attention" (Young, 2004, p. 99). As I took field notes, I analyzed how attitudes and interests manifest for each topic the audio critics addressed. I also considered the purpose of the interactions from my audience perspective to situate audio critics in the field. Every preface (the topic of conversation) has a use for those involved (the evaluation or point of the conversation). The topics in the podcasts were categorized by the perceived purposes to visualize how audio critics engage with films. The codebook reflected six evaluation types by the end of the study.

The aspects of Social Relations describe the forms of interaction between agents in an event (Fairclough, 2003). I considered how the audio critic engaged with each other and the audience. The aspects of social relations reflected how the actors brought the audience into the discourse during their podcasts. For example, a direct submission was when they read an email or played a voicemail from their listeners. Over the course of the sample, I got to know the routines and types of audience interactions to expect from the critics and a sense of how they formed social relationships. Part of the social relations also included the style of the critics, with two styles of discourse and interaction forming. One is the traditional style of review. The other is the storyteller style, which brings the audience along for the experience of the film as told through the perspective and eyes of the critic in rich detail.

The aspects of Communication Technology describe the pathways for inter-activity for the community (Fairclough, 2003). As an ethnographer, I curated the Twitter posts and other media content of each audio critic brand to consider how it engenders support and communicate with the audience (Spinelli & Dann, 2019). These artifacts of interactions provide the observable objects of study towards

the inter-activity of critics (Lindlof & Taylor, 2019). Additionally, I noted the market integration (commercials and sponsorships) to unpack how economic factors influence the performance; the advertisements illuminate imagined qualities of the audience as the sponsors decide where to advertise based on market performance. The advertisements also relied on communication technologies as many were externally recorded and placed into the episode—though many critics did read sponsored content live within the show too. The use of Twitter was defined originally through the framework from Spinelli and Dann (2019, p. 49). The emerging uses were not extensively modified as the sample used Twitter in largely the same ways. Three market integration (ad types) were observed through the study.

The data collected comprised of detailed notes on the topics of conversation, the performance qualities with audience interaction, and observations of the technology used. Each aspect of data informs the overarching question of how to situate audio critics within film criticism and the purpose of the discourse.

2.4   Sample

The case studies selected represent a breadth of capital, production affiliation, community sizes, and theoretical classifications of criticism. The variety represented provides a snapshot of practitioners across an emerging field (Shoemaker & Reese, 2014). Podcasting as a cultural industry includes practitioners from legacy media sources—those established networks with roots in broadcast radio, television, and print—as well as amateurs that were accounted for in the research sample (Sullivan, 2018). The five chosen case studies provided an appropriate base for this exploration of the emerging critical field within podcast spaces, following the ethnographic standards of favoring "relevant, active, interactive, substantial, heterogenous, and data-rich" communities (Kozinets, 2010, p. 94). The research sampled episodes and tweets from *Black Girl Film Club* (4 podcasts, 40 tweets), *Mostly Nitpicking* (5 podcasts, 9 tweets), *Pop Culture Happy Hour* (21 podcasts, 37 tweets), *The Big Picture* (12 podcasts, 109 tweets), and *Show Me the Meaning* (5 podcasts, 9 tweets) for a total of 47 podcast texts and 204 tweets/tweet threads. The sample did produce consistent practices, indicating thematic saturation within and across the 47 episodes from legacy-backed and crowd-backed critics.

In choosing the five case studies from the vast options available on podcast platforms, I used a theoretical sampling process for my foundational criterion based on McWhirter (2015, 2016). McWhirter established the six schools of criticism based on qualitative content analyses and interviews with film critique practitioners across North America and the United Kingdom, though McWhirter focused heavily on written work through newspapers, websites, and blogs. McWhirter argues that critics review films with attention to aesthetics, character design, and socio-politics based on institutional and personal influences, necessitating a framework to situate the point of view. McWhirter provides six schools of thought where "writers or institutions share similar ideas and methods, and although they may simultaneously contribute to and occupy multiple schools, their critical manifesto (how they operate in the sphere of film criticism at base level) is determined by the dominance of one school" (2016, location 1344/4850).
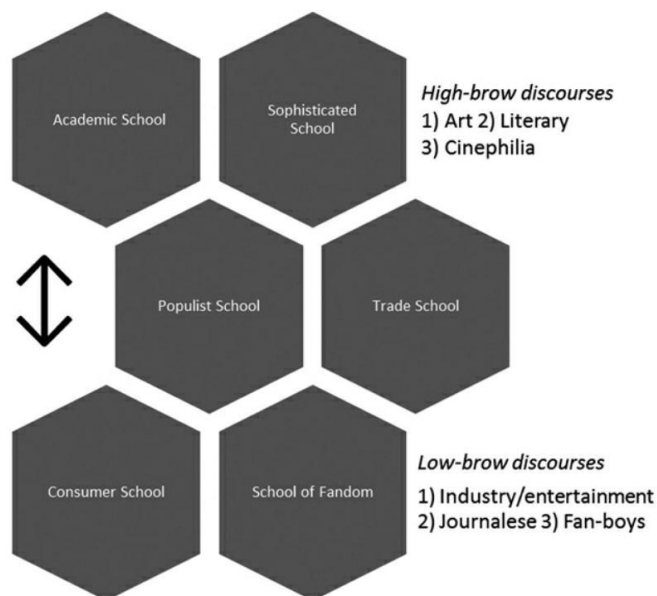
Figure 5: Six Schools of Contemporary Film Criticism. McWhirter (2015)

As I narrowed my sample search, I looked for cases that appeared to embody the central characteristics of the schools (McWhirter, 2016, Chapter 2/Location 1321-1423):

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- *Academic:* provide in-depth specialisms with little concern to the audience or commercial pressures to analyze film

- *Sophisticated:* interpret complex issues via certain experiences or knowledge through intelligent writing and awareness of non-specialist readers

- *Populist:* consider the audience (for the critic) above critical or intellectual thought processes to provide consumable, entertaining information likened to advertising for the film

- *Trade:* predict the audience market and financial or critical metrics by understanding audience taste

- *Consumer:* convey their views on cinema and individual films through statements, debates, comment threads, or lengthy reviews

The sixth school, the school of fandom, was not represented in this theoretical sampling choice due to the hyper-targeted nature that follows directors, franchises, genres, and auteurs (McWhirter, 2015). The breadth of fandom audio critics in the ecosystem is worth a more in-depth investigation and was beyond the scope of this research.[5] McWhirter's framework offers a honeycomb structure to indicate the tabular quality of distinct perspectives contributing to the overall shape of film discourses and notes that additional schools, yet to be revealed, will extend the honeycomb framework.

These theoretical definitions guided the initial selection of podcasts based on the program descriptions and pilot observations; however, as observed in this research, the audio critics were clustered in the sophisticated and consumer schools—to an extent. The audio critics did not fully fit into any of the schools, and a new framework of niches of discourse emerged to explain the characteristics. The sample was further selected based on the fiscal model, production factors, the hosts and critics, and the amount of Twitter followers. I selected five case studies that attempted to align theoretical criteria while cutting across economic and social audience segments.

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[5] I recommend studying multiple fandom cases to understand how they can be situated within the niches of the media ecosystem.

Table 1: Summary Showing Theoretical Sampling at Time of Selection

Theoretical Foundation	Sample Name	Show Description	Apple Rating	Twitter Followers	Funding Structure	Status
Academic: provide in-depth specialisms with little concern to the audience or commercial pressures to analyze film	Show Me the Meaning Wisecrack Crew—rotating with Austin Hayden (@austin_hayden) as consistent host	*"dive into the deeper meaning and cultural significance of the most, and least, iconic movies of our age"*	4.8 Stars from 1.1k Ratings	@wisecrack 23,000+	Sponsorships Patreon 700+ Patrons	Crowd
Sophisticated: interpret complex issues via certain experiences or knowledge through intelligent writing and awareness of non-specialist readers	Pop Culture Happy Hour Rotating with Linda Holmes (@lindaholmes), Glen Weldon (@ghweldon), Stephen Thompson (@idislikestephen), and Aisha Harris (@craftingmystyle) and guests	*"serves you recommendations and commentary on the buzziest movies…from lowbrow to highbrow to the stuff in between, they take it all with a shot of cheer"*	4.5 Stars from 8.4k Ratings	@pchh 40,000+	Sponsorships and Donations	Legacy
Trade: predict the audience market and financial or critical metrics by understanding audience taste	The Big Picture Rotating with Sean Fennessey (@seanfennessey) and Amanda Dobbins (@akdobbins) as consistent	*"dives into movies with Hollywood's biggest filmmakers, breaks down latest trends, handicaps the upcoming Oscars race, and reviews new films"*	4.4 Stars from 2.9k Ratings	@thebigpic 20,000+	Sponsorships	Legacy
Consumer: convey their views on cinema and individual films through statements, debates, comment threads, or lengthy reviews	Black Girl Film Club Ashley Ayer (@ashleyayer) and Britney Brinson (@its_britney)	*"creating a space for Black girls to watch and discuss movies…they analyze movies and the film industry from their unique, and often underrepresented, point of view"*	4.6 Stars from 28 Ratings	@blkgirlfilmclub 1,000+	Sponsorship	Crowd
Populist: consider audience above critical or intellectual thought to provide entertaining information likened to advertising for the film	Mostly Nitpicking Mathew Kelly—known as Nando (@nandovmovies), DJ Chapman (@zippybyday), and Chris Diggins (@thisisanoddname)	*"analyze a piece of pop culture by looking exclusively at the details"*	4.7 Stars from 369 Ratings	@nitpickingpod 3,000+	Patreon 550+ Patrons	Crowd

CHAPTER 3.   CASE STUDY ANALYSIS

As outlined in the methods, I used ethnographic inquiry to explore the world of five audio critics by pairing experiential field notes with close readings of podcast discourses to situate how this medium of movie review contributes to film criticism. This chapter provides insights and descriptions from my digital field experience that spanned November 2020 through January 2021 to provide a snapshot of each case study. Each critic receives a subsection, beginning with *Show Me the Meaning*, where data from the individual routines blends with reflections on my experiences as a play participant in the interpretive communities. The chapter ends with an unpacking of how the organizational, technological, and economic factors manifested across the discourse by comparing four reviews of <u>Wonder Woman 1984</u>[6] (one audio critic, *Black Girl Film Club*, did not review the movie).

As we move through the case sections, the niche perspectives that frame each discourse will emerge through the examples and explanations of the audio critics' reality building. The research framework considered how each audio critic follows routines to resonate with the imagined audience and the interpreted realities they occupy with the listeners (Berger & Luckmann, 1990; Litt, 2012). For example, *The Big Picture* typically discussed the technical aspects and praised the creative agents behind film culture to form a technical niche, and it consistently stuck to a traditional style of structured and outlined discussion topics. When it instead roasted the plot of <u>Wonder Woman 1984,</u> some of the disgruntled listeners reprimanded the hosts on Twitter and in the Apple Podcast reviews. My impressions of the discourses paired with community interactions led to four consistent and recognizable niches. A critical niche is a descriptor for the dominant perspective and discursive purpose to which the interpretive community can be categorized. The critic will speak through lenses of discourse to engender a niche

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[6] <u>Wonder Woman 1984</u>, 2020. *Diana must contend with a work colleague and businessman, whose desire for extreme wealth sends the world down a path of destruction, after an ancient artifact that grants wishes goes missing.*

audience. I provide the codebook definition for each niche to prime your reading in the remainder of the chapter.

- Canonical niche: to discuss the artistic qualities of a text within the framework of critical evaluation (a classic approach to review)
- Technical niche: to elevate the practitioners and practices of cultural production (an industry centered approach to review)
- Interpretive niche: to ground interpretations of a text in common language and experiences (a contextual approach to review)
- Affective niche: to express an experience with the text (a personal approach to review)

Within their critical niche, hosts of the audio critic shows function as a type of micro-celebrity: audiences are tuning into the podcast to listen to their chosen hosts describe a film, provide their opinions, and break down topics or questions related to the story. Micro-celebrity culture has been studied far more through visual mediums such as Instagram and YouTube (Ryan, 2019) and highly textual platforms like Twitter (Marwick & boyd, 2010) to understand how users engage with strategic, or niche, audiences to maintain forms of attention. Researchers consistently find that micro-celebrities perform strategic tasks in content creation and audience interactions that cultivate a persona the audience can relate to while building an emotional connection. Micro-celebrities tend to leverage behind-the-scenes content, insights into their "personal" life, earned social or institutional credentials, and emotional engagement to build effective personae (Marshall, 2013; McRae, 2017). The hosts displayed many of these strategies across their content. For example, I learned Sean and Amanda (*The Big Picture*) deeply miss going to theaters (COVID) because the setting weighs on their impression of a film, and sometimes they would go to a movie together [behind-the-scenes]. I learned that Austin (*Show Me the Meaning*) lives in Australia and loves live theater [personal life]. And Britney (*Black Girl Film Club*) has seizures and often finds movies triggering, so she provides warnings and tips for the listeners who may experience the same reaction [emotional engagement].

These strategies are associated with building an audience and gaining popularity (Mishra & Ismail, 2017), and in the competitive and fragmented space for audio critics, the continued maintenance of audience and increase of listenership matters. The data makes sense: I learned more about the people

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providing the audio criticisms than I might learn about a *New York Times* author from their reading

reviews because those authors have a legacy platform with a defined readership and do not need to

connect with the audience in the same way. Additionally, podcasts afford a level of intimacy that written

work does not (Swiatek, 2018). That mediated intimacy between host and audience may lead to more

personal sharing while requiring strategies to maintain a reasonable relationship with an imagined, yet

very real and existing, group of internet followers.

The experiential aspect of this study and the micro-celebrity strategies led me to feel a connection

with the individual hosts, but more-so with the audio critic as a program because of the rotating nature of

the hosts. I found myself genuinely anticipating new episodes each week: seeing the bright blue of the

Mostly Nitpicking logo on my Spotify feed or hearing the cheery theme song of *Pop Culture Happy Hour*

became highlights of my time in the field. Furthermore, when *Show Me the Meaning* took its winter break

from production, I felt a moment of melancholy even though I knew it would return. It was like a beloved

TV show between seasons.

Beyond the feelings I encountered towards the leaders of my newfound communities, the

experience pointed me towards the technologic affordances and additional channels of content leveraged

by the hosts. The research position as a play participant, one who embodies the audience/community

while remaining systematic in data collections, led me to Discord servers, email newsletters, and parallel

YouTube channels that all inform the situation of audio critics in the ecosystem of media and film

discourse. One such surprise was that *Black Girl Film Club's* Ashley and Britney partnered with

Occidental College in LA on a [YouTube webinar about media representation](). The event with the Critical

Theory and Social Justice department was in September 2020; *Black Girl Film Club* tweeted an end-of-

year thank you and referenced the event in its year-end wrap-up, which led me to find the YouTube video.

This chapter unpacks the uses of technologies through the individual and organizational levels of

influence to build a foundation for situating the broader field of audio criticism. This study presents

research threads for multi-media criticism with exciting potential and needed attention.

As we move into the case study sections, a basic organizational structure exists. Each case section begins with background information on the critic, the hosts, and the organization. Listenership for podcasts is notoriously difficult to find, with industry leaders like NPR continuously advocating for standardization of metrics across platforms internally (Sullivan, 2018), and external vanity metrics are not currently available in 2021. The data for popularity and audience comes from reporting the social media vanity metrics and the Apple Podcast Review numbers. Then the data sets for the podcast production and functions of Twitter are presented. This study collected data on Twitter because each audio critic had an active Twitter account to offer a point of consistency, and Twitter has served previous research on journalists (Mourão, 2014), microcelebrities (Marwick & boyd, 2010), podcasts (Spinelli & Dann, 2019), and cultural discourses well. I then provide observations and analysis on the economics and any other emerging communication technologies or influences.

3.1 Show Me the Meaning

Show Me the Meaning (@wisecrack) is on the Wisecrack network, which produces content for YouTube and several popular culture podcasts. Wisecrack represents a mature crowd-backed organization, grown through channels of community support rather than entering the field through an established institution. The *Show Me the Meaning* podcast and Wisecrack brand operate within a lower-middle taste culture that questions some of the aspects of culture while creating accessible and meaningful interactions from the forms in art (Gans, 1999). In a YouTube stream, the co-founder Jared Bauer described the intention of Wisecrack to translate classic literature and media into accessible ways while staying true to the intent of the text. He described how he "gets so pissed off at philosophers because, instead of what they should be doing is making a YouTube channel and presenting ideas to people outside the academy they spend their time writing books that only ten people will read and nine of the ten will just pretend to understand" (56:00, Bauer, 2021). The media group was founded in 2014 with the "Thug Notes[7]" series and was eventually purchased by a Canadian media company, Omnia Media, in

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[7] Thug Notes is a series of classic literature summary and analysis hosted by comedian Greg Edwards. The concept reflects a video essay form of CliffsNotes or SparkNotes with an "original gangster" style. The first episode

2019. *Show Me the Meaning* is one of seven podcasts maintained by the brand that also includes nine YouTube series (Wisecrack, n.d.). Wisecrack, the YouTube Channel, is extremely popular on the platform with over 3 million subscribers in 2021. It also has verified Instagram and Twitter accounts with 17 thousand and 24 thousand followers, respectively. The Twitter account grew by nearly 4,000 since early September 2020, when it was first identified as a sample for this project. The Facebook page is followed by 480,000+ people, and all these numbers demonstrate the popularity and potential that crowd-backed organizations can have when resonating with a niche.

The niche for *Show Me the Meaning*, the audio critic podcast for movies, represents a subsect of the larger Wisecrack audience. The Wisecasts YouTube channel, where the video streams of the podcasts are hosted, reflects 34 thousand subscribers, with each *Show Me the Meaning* episode receiving a few thousand views. Based on the Apple Podcast reviews, which is an external metric for this study of podcasts, *Show Me the Meaning* has a 4.8 Star Rating based on 1.1k ratings. The visible audience provided mostly positive ratings with a small portion of one or two stars. The negative reviews primarily reflected one of three themes: 1) dislike of a particular host, 2) complaints about audio volume when transitioning to advertisements, and 3) disagreement of the analysis and opinions the hosts present. But the positive reviews, with praise for the hosts and the analysis provided far outweigh visible negatives or neutral reviews.

The "crew at Wisecrack" rotate into the discussions with contributors Austin Hayden (@austin_hayden), Raymond Creamer (@creamatoria), Ryan Hailey (@ryansgameshow), or Amanda Scherker (@amandascherker) as common voices. Just before the research period in September of 2020, Jared Bauer stepped away from Wisecrack, leaving space for others to take the lead in forming routines and conventions for the network of shows. Jared filled the hosting role for *Show Me the Meaning* as the facilitator of conversation and consistent voice in episodes. Austin Hayden took over that role as the

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was on <u>Crime and Punishment</u>, uploaded June 3, 2013. The last of was uploaded on November 28, 2017 for Jane Austen's <u>Emma</u>. The series uploaded 108 videos with many exceeding 1 million views. See
<u>https://www.wisecrack.co/thug-notes</u>

leader of the discussions and person to introduce each show, read the advertising spots, keep the conversation on time, and end the episodes. Austin, who used to go by Smidt instead of Hayden, appeared on the first episode of *Show Me the Meaning* with Jared Bauer and Ryan Hailey in November 2017. That first episode covered Mother![8] and it focused the discussion on the allegory that the movie presents, demonstrating the interpretive roots from the start.

    Above all others, *Show Me the Meaning* reminded me of classrooms and my grad cohort office because of the intentional turn-taking that provided space for each perspective in the conversation and many multisyllabic words paired with scholarly jargon or theory terms. Terms like "problematic," "ideology," and "artifacts" often make their way into the discourse, as I find happens when I talk with my colleagues about media. *Show Me the Meaning* also use phrases like "I argue" or "I would push back" when presenting thoughts on a movie's theme, which again felt very familiar to me as a common strategy for academic discussions and debate. When it discussed Ready Player One[9] on December 11, 2020, Austin Hayden, Ryan Hailey, and Raymond Creamer talked about the derivative nature of film and the use of nostalgia to sell movies today. The segment transcribed here demonstrates the routine of turn-taking, with each host receiving a specific opportunity to share, and shows the way they articulate their ideas through a blend of high-level and accessible language.

> *Austin, December 11, 2020, 28:24, Link*
> *When you peel back and go the real, right, there is not, at least from the film that I could tell, there wasn't actually much to give me an understanding of the actual world of the real. Except for we've got a greedy corporation, and we've got a bunch of people who want to use the technology for good rather than for exploitation. Whereas the greedy corporation just wants to do its profit a lot. But that is sort flimsy and superficial. I would love more. You know.*

> *Raymond, 28:47*
> *Yeah, but even with that I think the story is overall, once again, at war with itself. They spend the whole movie decrying IOI [an in-movie character] as this you know faceless, nameless, fascistic gestalt. But I mean all the gunters [an in-movie term for a character group] are essentially a mirror version of that. They're all trying achieve the same goal through similar means, which is that they are creating this hive mind of 80's pop culture ephemera. They are*

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[8] Mother! 2017. *A couple's relationship is tested when uninvited guests arrive at their home, disrupting their tranquil existence.*

[9] Ready Player One, 2018. *When the creator of a virtual reality called the OASIS dies, he makes a posthumous challenge to all OASIS users to find his Easter Egg, which will give the finder his fortune and control of his world.*

all obsessed with the same thing. They are all ideologically identical too. So, it is like on one hand you want to see them control the Oasis [an in-movie term for the main setting] if the alternative is IOI because they are going to cover the huds [in-movie term] with ads, and they are going to run it into the ground or whatever. But it is still kind of revealing to me that the answer to this nameless, faceless, ideologically identical villain is a somewhat less nameless, faceless, ideologically identical protagonist. And that the only reason they are not completely nameless and faceless is because they choose from several different 80's appropriate skins. And that is it.

Ryan, 29:59

I would push back on not only that but also on the reference heaviness of this movie and stuff, and on that being a bad thing. I would say it is a really timeless thing, really. In terms of, right this is about video games and comic book characters, but just replace that with you know, westerns and cowboys or Vikings and stuff. And people being obsessed with the stories and myths and escapism in general. It is about escapism and whatever. And I think it just feels different when you replace the oldness of yesteryear with the weird shit from the 80s that is so specific. And all of sudden you know all about the making of it and the people involved, and so it takes on a different life. And people are more obsessed with it now. Maybe because we have more leisure time, I don't know. So yeah, this is not as much a modern new age thing. This is just the on-crack version of people being obsessed with stories and escapism and not their own lives.

In line with Jared Bauer's description of his vision for Wisecrack when founding the channel, *Show Me the Meaning* unpacks film at a high level using scholarly terms yet provide more accessible content than associated with traditional academic institutions. The way the hosts layer in regular language like "weird shit" brings the discourse to relatable levels. Traditional academics can falter in providing engaging criticism to non-academic audiences because the writing tends to privilege the language and thought developed in institutions of higher education over praxis that provides action and assists the listeners in gaining critical consciousness (Freire, 2005). *Show Me the Meaning* explains big concepts while demonstrating confidence in the imagined audience's comprehension. It throws out academic terms and defines enough of the terminology for listeners to stay on the same page, like in the episode for Ferris Bueller's Day Off.[10]

Austin, December 4, 2020, 28:56, Link
I just tweeted out that this is an essentially anti-capitalist film. Because it is precisely that, Evan. It is not anti-capitalist in a socialist or Marxist or like some sort of collective solidarity or building alternatives. It is anarchism. But it is a type of anarchism, exactly like you said Evan, where this is a system, we are being pushed through. In education theory, a lot of times they look at the American education system as being a factory to produce new workers. Right.

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[10] Ferris Bueller's Day Off, 1986. *A high school wise guy is determined to have a day off from school, despite what the principal thinks of that.*

And they have the like top 20% that will go into white collar positions and be doctors and lawyers. And maybe the bottom percent will drop out and not finish. But it is that middle, that middle chunk that are going to be the workers of the next age. The grunts for industry and for corporations and for capital. Right.

Raymond pushes Austin to expand and define what he means further:

If this is an expression of anarchy for him to take off the day or whatever, how does it jive with your theory? And I am not challenging it, I am just curious that all he does with his free day is go experience signifiers of upper-class wealth or managerial wealth. I hear what you are saying but it is still one of those things that is like, I don't know, I feel like this dude is going to work in a skyscraper one day.

Austin goes on to connect the importance of finding "pockets of escape" in the capitalist machine and agrees with Raymond's assertion that there is "an immense degree of privilege that allows Ferris that freedom." This discursive banter laced with pointed theoretical arguments represents a norm observed throughout the *Show Me the Meaning* sample for you to imagine as we move forward in this analysis.

Show Me the Meaning also streams its conversations live over YouTube, which allows the audience to interact in a chat. *Show Me the Meaning's* content was notably accessible and used much of the technological affordances available in the production and distribution of the show. While scrolling through the Twitter feed early into the research process I saw the promotional Tweet for the upcoming Ferris Bueller episode, and to my surprise I was taken to YouTube not Spotify. I stumbled into the conversation midway as Austin, Raymond, and Evan Yee (a rotating guest and content producer at Wisecrack) were streaming to a few hundred community members. Folks were in the chat with our hosts referencing the live chat and responding directly to the community. The live YouTube versions are recorded on Wednesdays with the audio-only versions posted to Spotify on Fridays. I later discovered that the Wisecrack Network has a secondary YouTube channel, Wisecasts by Wisecrack, where lightly edited versions of the original live streams are housed. The live streams remain as unlisted videos on YouTube, accessible only through the direct link (typically promoted via Twitter).

It also actively integrates comments from the YouTube live stream, which contributes to the perceived value of the community to the show. I was routinely struck by the ways it actively included the audience in the conversations, going so far as to verbally use turn-taking when playing voicemails. For

example, in the <u>Ready Player One</u> episode, Austin introduces an upcoming voicemail from Ramsey for context and then transitions into the message with, "go ahead Ramsey," as if the caller was actively on the line and in the conversation. *Show Me the Meaning* leveraged the technological infrastructure to include the audience as active influences on the discourse as a routine. The last 10 minutes are dedicated to the "mailbag," where the hosts read emails or listen to voicemails related to previous episodes and build additional discussion from that. The practice of mailbags and invitations for audience participation runs parallel to findings from journalists who moderate online commentary. Some journalists leverage social media to elevate the readers' voices as a community development tactic. Journalists working in online and participatory spaces build community by recognizing the contributions of the audience and imagining a valuable community (Wolfgang, Blackburn, &McConnell, 2020). The audio critics here displayed similar practices by physically integrating the communities' voices as sources of content and vetting them to uphold the imagination of a valuable, engaged, and highly intellectual group of listeners. *Show Me the Meaning* would be a worthwhile case to study with a scope of a full year's worth of episodes and deeper dive into the Chat comments, YouTube comments, and listeners' voicemails to gain perspective on the interpretive communities within the public intellectual theory and participatory spaces for online commentary.

Next, the basic analysis of the quantitative data about the *Show Me the Meaning* sample provides context on the routines for the show. I outline the number of episodes produced, length and frequency before unpacking the structure and experience with the episodes. Then I do the same with the Twitter data that informs the social relations I observed among the community.

Show Me the Meaning produced five episodes during December 2020 and January 2021 for a total of 304 minutes. The podcast took a break for the holidays between December 18 and January 15, which was the longest hiatus among the sample. Again, the routines of academia resonated with me as the break felt like a winter holiday between semesters. Due to the break in the middle of the sampling period, I chose to include an additional episode released in late January to analyze a more robust sample.

During the five episodes, *SMTM* reflected highly consistent production practices, indicating organizational routines at a play:

- the average episode length was 60.8 minutes, with a range of only four minutes

- every episode was released on a Friday

- direct submissions (community voicemails or emails) were included in every episode near the 50-minute mark

- the episodes followed a naming convention to include the film title, director, and a cheeky statement to indicate the theme. For example: Ferris Bueller's Day Off (Directed by John Hughes)-American Psycho Jr.

Show Me the Meaning typically began its episodes by going around the host panel and asking for their initial reactions or impressions, which is a pattern that all the audio critics followed and represents a habitus in the field. Then Austin would prompt the discussion questions, which typically revolved around a central theme related to the film, such as capitalism (Ferris Bueller's Day Off), nostalgia (Ready Player One), humor in societies (Bad Santa[11]), morality (Wonder Woman 1984), and purpose in life (Soul). The end of the episodes featured a mailbag segment where emails and voicemails from the audience were discussed.

Show Me the Meaning used the Twitter account of the central @wisecrack handle[12]. The Twitter activity accounted for very few, around 6%, of the total tweets collected in this sample (via the Twitter API pull), with nine total tweets from the @wisecrack handle. More than half of the tweets were general commentary not related to audio criticism, which makes sense because *Show Me the Meaning* uses the

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[11] Bad Santa (2003) *A miserable conman and his partner pose as Santa and his Little Helper to rob department stores on Christmas Eve. But they run into problems when the conman befriends a troubled kid.*

[12] In July 2021 *Show Me the Meaning* created a unique Twitter handle. That data is not included in this research and should be noted for any future studies. A brief, unstructured analysis of the new handle indicates that the central purpose remains publicity with little audience engagement as the links for new episodes are primarily posted.

Wisecrack network's Twitter handle rather than a show-specific account. When the tweets were about

audio criticism, they tended to market the new

episodes by providing the link to access the new content.

Figure 6: Publicity Function on the Wisecrack Twitter Account

The access link in these posts linked the audience to a hidden YouTube where the audio critic was live on

the platform. The live shows were recorded and uploaded to Patreon (without ads) and Spotify several

days later. The videos are also uploaded to the Wisecasts YouTube channel. Wisecrack received 408 total

Likes on the tweets, with most interactions occurring on the General posts.

Table 2: Breakdown of the Wisecrack Twitter Activity

Row Labels	Count of Function of Tweet	Average of Likes	Sum of Likes2	Average of Replies	Sum of Replies2	Average of Retweets	Sum of Retweets2
⊞General	5	59.4	297	3	30.61%	3.6	64.29%
⊞Publicity	3	23.33333333	70	8	46.94%	2	17.86%
⊞Recommendation	1	41	41	11	22.45%	5	17.86%
Grand Total	9	45.33333333	408	5.444444444	100.00%	3.111111111	100.00%

The tweet with the most interaction from the Wisecrack community was the introduction of a new host member for the channel—not for the *Show Me the Meaning* podcast. The routine for social media was loose and informative to share updates for the audience. I do not recommend Twitter as the primary tool to research and measure audience interactions or discourse with *Show Me the Meaning* or Wisecrack. Instead, YouTube comments may be the more insightful location for discourse analysis from the community to compare with the discourse from the critics.

In looking at the organization and economic structures, I could see how the crowd-backed roots and primary use of social media (via YouTube) influence the production of *Show Me the Meaning*. The feeling of being considered, as an audience member, within the very structure of the podcast is demonstrated by the live chat acknowledgments and the mailbag segment. This organizational routine of guiding the audience towards care and enlightenment is also connected to the sponsored content and advertisers integrated into the work.

The way *Show Me the Meaning* integrated SponCon into the episodes maintained a sense of connection and care for the audience with more genuine authenticity in the product. Far more than the legacy-backed cases who felt like radio spots when an advertisement occurred, *Show Me the Meaning* personalized the advertisements with stories from the hosts own use of the product or recommendations. When giving a shout-out to Shutter as a sponsor, Austin recommended Leap of Faith, which streams on the Shutter service, to his co-hosts and the audience. He describes the movie as "it is William Friedkin on The Exorcist. He basically talks about the making of the film, the production of the film, the ideas behind the film. It is freaking fantastic, so I would definitely recommend that one" (Austin, December 18, 2020, 30:01, Link). When providing the sponsored content for NordVPN, Austin explained his experiences with internet security and why a VPN is useful in his life when he "travels a lot and is bouncing around to coffee shops and things like that. So, if I were using the VPN, it would have been a much wiser thing. And the silly thing is I have it, so I just got to fricken turn it on and use it" (Austin, December 11, 2020, 15:48, Link). Austin is clearly reading portions of the ad when watching the YouTube version, and looks

directly at the camera when injecting his personal experiences with the products. The combination of obvious sponsored copy with more personal reflection fosters a sense of authenticity around the product.

Show Me the Meaning opted for brands that cater to the individual experience: Magic Spoon is a subscription cereal service so customers can get the cereal flavor they want delivered, SkillShare allows individuals to build their skills, NordVPN protects the individual's online privacy, and Shutter is a streaming platform serving the individual content on demand. Compared to the legacy-backed critics, the Wisecrack organization continuously emphasized individualized products for the audience it seem to imagine valuing the hyper-targeted experience that enhances and protects individual sense of self, purpose, and desires. The WordCloud visualization of the sponsors or advertisements on *Show Me the Meaning* point towards the focused number of brands with that individualized commercial emphasis. Notably, the ads for McDonalds, TIAA Retirement, and Sales Force, which do not reflect the same values as the other sponsors, were not sponcon but rather embedded only on the Spotify version of the podcasts. It appears Spotify placed the ads on the content, which signals that *Show Me the Meaning* is popular enough to sell ad-space at the distribution level for Spotify's profit model.

Figure 7: SMTM promoted brands tied to aspirational goals

Show Me the Meaning is also economically backed by the Wisecrack Patreon. Patreon is a company "With a subscription-style payment model, fans pay their favorite creators a monthly amount of their choice in exchange for exclusive access, extra content, or a closer look into their creative journey" (Patreon, 2021). On the Wisecrack Patreon, community members can opt into four tiers of support:

1. Wisecrack Heads, $2.00
2. Wisecrack House, $5.00
3. Wisecrack University, $10.00
4. Wisecrack Special Friends, $50.00

At the time of writing (Fall 2021), Wisecrack lists a goal to "be able to do more work with our creative friends." It is 73% complete in this goal per the Patreon metrics, which previously listed a dollar amount of $3,000 (Spring 2021) but has since removed that bar. The next goal was listed at $5,000 monthly Patreon profits and now says to make additional "niche topics since we rely on ad sponsorships and YouTube revenue. …we'll get to make content on more obscure subjects and topics that YOU request." Wisecrack goes on to list movies like Drive, The Rocky Horror Picture Show, and Fargo as examples. It is 44% complete in that goal.

In summary, *Show Me the Meaning* reflects a crowd-backed organization that presents an influence on the extent it acknowledges and formally bring the communities into the interpretation of the film. It leverages infrastructure on YouTube to provide the live chat platform to the most engaged of the audience who catch the links on Twitter or ask YouTube to "remind" them when *Show Me the Meaning* goes live. This audio critic also leverages editing technologies to insert voicemails from the community as if they were on the line and part of the conversation itself. The crowd-backed organization also influenced the economic dynamics of the show. *Show Me the Meaning* has sponsorships from brands that align with individualized experiences and cater towards self-improvement or media. While reading the SponCon, Austin often recommends specific SkillShare courses or flavors of Magic Spoon cereal to deepen a connection between the podcast, the sponsor, and the audience—potentially. The organization of Wisecrack also influenced the discourse of *Show Me the Meaning* by asserting the consistent academic tone with name dropping of theory and explanations of media. The Wisecrack organization may function as public intellectuals across the spectrum of the content and certainly on display within the *Show Me the Meaning* community. The niche that this audio critic speaks to is that of interpretive: grounding meaning and readings of a text in accessible ways for the audience.

3.2 Pop Culture Happy Hour

Pop Culture Happy Hour (@pchh) is part of the National Public Radio network of podcasts and radio shows. NPR dominates the podcasting space, with the Pew Research Center specifically reporting NPR podcast downloads in the annual Audio and Podcasting Fact Sheet. In 2020, NPR averaged a unique weekly userbase of nearly 14 million downloads (Pew Research Center, 2021). Not only has NPR influenced the consumption of podcast by the public, but National Public Radio podcasts have also been the subjects of numerous research projects from NPR Politics (Eruitt, 2019), Planet Money (Luther, 2015), and RadioLab (Spinelli & Dann, 2019), to name a few. The *Pop Culture Happy Hour* podcast has been understudied yet clearly makes an impact for the NPR network with over 300 episodes, 8.6 thousand reviews on Apple Podcasts, 46,000 likes on Facebook, and 44,000 Twitter followers in 2021. It grew by about 4,000 followers over the course of this project. Many of the Apple Podcast reviews are positive with a 4.5 average rating. *Pop Culture Happy Hour* exists within an upper-middle taste culture that appeals to well-educated consumers looking for recommendations and distinctions among the cultural tastes and artifacts with some heightened understanding of the forms (Gans, 1999). That taste culture positions critics as a profession and authority to guide the consumers through the landscape of media.

The podcast features a rotating panel of critics and journalists led by Linda Holmes (@lindaholmes), Glen Weldon (@ghweldon), or Stephen Thompson (@idislikestephen). While Spotify archived back to February 2020, the show began on July 22, 2010, as "a very special audio experiment in which NPR's Linda Holmes sits down for a chat" with a focus on television, movies, and pop culture (NPR, 2010). Within a few episodes, Stephen and Glen began to appear regularly, based on episode descriptions. Aisha Harris (@craftingmystyle) was introduced as the newest host in December 2020. The hosts are consistent voices but not exclusive or always present in the episodes. For example, in the Small

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<u>Axe</u>[13] episode, Aisha Harris was alone with the guest for the conversation, while in <u>Soul</u>[14], the entire

group of hosts participated. The model of rotating hosts and special guests added variety to the episodes

while emphasizing the importance of a stable brand and persona for the show itself—not the particular

people participating. However, based on the community reviews, the rotating of guest hosts may not have

been a routine prior to 2020. Many of the reviews, both positive and negative, mentioned the "new" hosts

compared to Linda, Glen, and Stephen.

     In looking through the community reviews, two clusters of primarily negative reviews stood out:

the first in December 2020 and the second in early Spring 2021. December was when the production

schedule changed to reflect daily episodes and the logo was rebranded. This cluster primarily focuses on

that rebranding and new iteration of production with the visible reactants disliking daily episodes. The

second negative cluster focused more on the content of the audio critics and frequently mentioned the

tone of the program shifting with the depth and variety of the discussions waning. Perhaps the year of

COVID-19 coupled with seemingly non-stop socio-political issues has, as mexiilexii put it, left "no joy"

in the show (2/24/2021). While that second cluster of negativities was outside the official sampling

period and field time, it occurred as I was reviewing and writing the analysis. It marks a continued trend

of less positive reviews, which could be studied in future work on audience expectations and outcomes

for micro-celebrities or audio critics who attempt to change the niches or practices. I recommend

returning to *Pop Culture Happy Hour* in 2022 to compare the audience interactions to that of 2019 and

2020 for a snapshot of change strategies in the podcast sphere.

     Feedback such as Gongster84's enlightened me the most to the niche change and how the purpose

of the discourse shifted in 2020 (posted 12/14/2020):

> *I was at first excited about the potential of getting PCHH daily, now I feel the new format has*
> *ruined my once favorite podcast. The lack of depth in these new episodes is astonishing. Feels*
> *like you guys are just trying to churn out content daily instead of actually discussing things*

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[13] <u>Small Axe</u>, 2020. *Small Axe is based on the real-life experiences of London's West Indian community and is set between 1969 and 1982.*

[14] <u>Soul</u>, 2020. *After landing the gig of a lifetime, a New York jazz pianist suddenly finds himself trapped in a strange land between Earth and the afterlife.*

that you love. If you don't care about the topics, then why should we? I really missed the in-depth discussion and the banters between the hosts from before.

Old Review:

I can't express how much I love this show. It not only gives me ideas of what shows and movies to watch so I don't waste time on mediocre ones. It's a pop culture "book club", after I watch anything I always curious what the Linda, Stephen and Glen are going to say. The show lets us engage with the things we consume at the deeper level.

Pop Culture Happy Hour led to the emergence of the canonical niche, which centers the artistic evaluations of film within the discussion. I agree that the routines of discussion I observed did less to deeply unpack a topic and focused more on the mechanics of storytelling and the execution of ideas on screen with recommendations on how to view or interpret the forms of the product. For example, most episodes followed the routine set early in the sample with <u>Scott Pilgrim vs. the World</u>[15] on December 6, 2020, with Glen and guest hosts Mallory Yu (@mallory_yu), Daoud Tyler-Ameen (@artsorority), and Jourdain Searles (@jourdainsearles). The middle portion of the episode centers on the character, Knives Chau (Ellen Wong), where they acknowledge some racial and gendered issues but don't dig into the conversation with much depth.

> *Glen, December 6, 2020, 7:54, Link*
> *Even though it is a very thinly written part, Knives Chau, and it is problematic as well, Ellen Wong is pretty great. She is doing a great job with this. She just throws herself into this role, so deeply, that she at first expands the stereotype and then pushes past it and then completely blows it up in my mind. She creates a living, breathing character with whom you cannot help but empathize. It is a testament to an actress who is remarkably fearless.*

> *Jourdain, 8:21*
> *Her career not blowing up has made me angry for like 10 years.*

> *Mallory, 8:29*
> *Oh yeah. As a 21-year-old watching this I immediately, obviously related to Knives because I was a 17-year-old weird Asian kid once. If I had watched this or read the books as a kid, I think that the character if Knives would have reinforced a lot of negative stereotypes that I already had internalized. So, it is hard to watch it as an adult who has moved passed some of these stereotypes and wants to push past them to see a character as thinly written as her, written by an Asian man. It is hard to swallow some of the, what I see as, internalized racism in her character and characterization. And I think it is sort of the humor of the time, I just can't connect with it anymore.*

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[15] <u>Scott Pilgrim vs. The World</u>, 2010. *In a magically realistic version of Toronto, a young man must defeat his new girlfriend's seven evil exes one by one in order to win her heart.*

Jourdain, 9:17

It seems like Bryan Lee O'Malley, and I thought this at the time too, that he was like dealing with a lot of bi-racial angst. And you can see that in the sense that most of the characters are white. And I feel like that is where he was at the time. He was writing all these white characters and then here is the one Asian one. And it is like he just couldn't deal with writing her better.

Glen, 9:38

Absolutely. Let's take a short break, and then when we come back, we will dive into the distinctive sounds of <u>Scott Pilgrim Vs. the World</u> and the Michael Cera of it all. So don't go away.

The conversation could have taken a turn into a socio-political discussion on what stereotypes are referenced (it is never explained in the episode exactly what is portrayed), how those stereotypes took hold in our culture, how representation matters and operates differently in 2020 compared to 2010, how bi-racial angst rests within logics of white supremacy, and numerous other avenues of racial and identity discourses captured among critical culture scholars (Omi &Winant, 2015; see also Collins, 2017; Delgado & Stefancic, 2017; Ngai, 2004; Perry, 2016). Instead, *Pop Culture Happy Hour* alludes to the issues and presents potential for deeper, more theoretical conversation before turning away and into more canonical analysis. *Pop Culture Happy Hour*, with its established and larger audience base, holds the potential to meaningfully focus on the experiences of marginalized groups while moving towards action and participation. In considering the framework outlined by Kershaw (1992/2007) to merge Black Studies into larger disciplines, such as cultural journalism and criticism, *Pop Culture Happy Hour* hits on several points. It identifies an interest group and develops some understanding of the histories and relationships surrounding the position of the cultural representation and artifact under discussion. But the discourse falls short when comparing the conditions of people and participating in a practice of moving its listeners towards action or further engagement. *Pop Culture Happy Hour* does invite further discourse but with limited prompts and little moderating engagement on line; the audience is primarily offering feelings and unstructured opinions about the art form rather than action-oriented engagement in critical race practices. Based on the number of reviews and various interactions on Facebook attempting to

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engage in thematic analysis and more participation in the comparison of conditions and education, I gather that the community was more of an interpretive niche, like what *Show Me the Meaning* followed, and *PCHH* shifted the niche away from critical unpacking.

The artifacts of an interpretive niche can be found when the film heavily lends itself to socio-political discussion, representing the identification of an interest group where developing an understanding and studying the development of the conditions is readily available for discursive participation. *Pop Culture Happy Hour* did take time to unpack aspects of queer identities for The Prom, Immigrant-English identities in Small Axe, Black American oppressions in Ma Rainey's Black Bottom, and Mexican identities in Coco[16]. The Coco episode was a replay on December 28, 2020, with the original air date in 2017. This episode featured Linda, Glen, Stephen, and guest host Shereen Marisol Meraji (@radiomirage). The recast provides some insight into the past routines, which was coded as interpretive in the close reading. The episode begins with Shereen providing very specific examples of how and where the culture of Mexico intersects with the film that points towards a study of the development of the culture and the relationships in the social model. Sheeran gets nearly two entire minutes to explain and teach listeners about Mexican cultural elements from the film: a striking difference to the vague and short treatment of cultural topics in most other episodes for *Pop Culture Happy Hour*.

> *Shereen, December 28, 2020, 3:40, Link*
> *I was a little bit nervous because I know, for me, when you put a movie like this in the hands of a big studio that is headed up by white guys and it is delving into a whole other culture and world, I worry that stuff is going to seem off. And I have to say there weren't any cringe worthy moments for me. I was so charmed. Everything was done just right. The mix of Spanish and English in the film felt really organic in the film and not clunky or cheesy. It felt real. They used Mexicanisms like "no manches" and "hijole," very Mexican slang and Spanish. I loved it. I loved the way Mexican art was used and woven into the narrative. You know, papel picadas, which are those colorful banners made of tissue papers. You see them in all kinds of Mexican celebrations, and they are used to help tell the story in the beginning. And alebrijes, which are these magical, mystical animal creatures that are made out of papier-mâché. They are folk art. They are carved of wood. They come to life in the land of the dead as these spirit animals. There are all these references to Frida Kahlo. She has this hilarious cameo in the land of the dead as this director, choreographer. And then there is Ernesto de la Cruz. Who, when I saw him, I thought of the Mexican singer Vicente Fernández, aka "Chente." He is super famous and beloved in Mexico. He stars in all these old timey films. He wears those mariachi uniforms that are like bedazzled with gold threaded sombreros. I was just like, man. This is so*

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[16] Coco, 2017. *Aspiring musician Miguel, confronted with his family's ancestral ban on music, enters the Land of the Dead to find his great-great-grandfather, a legendary singer.*

well done. And I have to say, Stephen, it was so well done that tears were falling down my face
from the moment it started. It made me so emotional. You know, it was like wow this is on it.

Later in the episode, Shereen explains to the group what exact elements resonated in her screening where "99% of the theater was made up of Latino families" when Glen questioned if any of the jokes worked. Shereen is holding the role of educator in this episode as she speaks from aspects of the community and calls out the need to understand the conditions the movie reflects and the relationships influencing the reception on the representations (Kershaw, 1992/2007). In the explanation, the final evaluation (or purpose of the conversation) served me with the reminder and interpretation that not all jokes are made for white, mainstream American audiences as Linda affirms "I suspect it is absolutely true that the jokes are funnier the more you are steeped in the references they are making" (11:51). The tendency to view media, even when the subject is representing a non-white experience, through the lens of coded mainstream, upper-class, and white preferences stands out in the discourse between Glen, Linda, and Shereen (Entmen & Rojecki, 2000; Omi & Winant, 2015). In this case, an opposing view was present to enlighten the conversation towards other readings and perspectives; however, that valuable aspect of audio critics to bring alternate voices into the conversation and encourage participation in discourse was not heavily centered across the sample.

The directness and space for salient cultural topics in this 2017 episode did not consistently appear in the 2020 sample for *Pop Culture Happy Hour*. <u>Small Axe</u> and <u>Coco</u> were the only two episodes coded as interpretive instead of canonical, largely due to the specificity of the cultural explanations and concentrated unpacking of related histories. *The Pop Culture Happy Hour* episode on <u>Small Axe</u> brought in a guest, Ashley Clark the curatorial director at the Criterion Collection (@_Ash_Clark), to discuss the anthology of five films from Steve McQueen about immigration stories and experiences in the United Kingdom and Great Britain. Ashley Clark added a British perspective to the conversation and provided context on British racism and film history for the audience. An emphasis on studying the development and unpacking the relationships within society to compare conditions shows the potential power for consciousness raising and participation in activist practice—just too few and far between.

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Ashley Clark, December 16, 2020, 8:26, [Link](#)

Yes, Britain has an extremely poor history at confronting the reality of empire and that really filters through into the education system about what we get taught and what we don't get taught. And that the empire was this whole benevolent thing. And we never really learn about our history or how our institutions have shaped us as a community and oppressed us in very real and powerful ways. And I was very impressed in <u>Mangrove</u> with how Steve McQueen addresses the institutional racism of the police and the courts and the idea of collusion and the idea of traditional British standards of fair play. Because that is really what is happening. You have this entirely corrupt, really, network of officials who act as though they are operating in a very forthright and proud and fair play kind of way. While really existing only to oppress Black people. And the film teases that out in a very nuanced way with great performances and skillful writing from McQueen's contributors.

The production choice from *Pop Culture Happy Hour* to have Aisha Harris, a Black host, and Ashley Clark, author of <u>Facing Blackness: Media and Minstrelsy in Spike Lee's "Bamboozled"</u> and former film curator for the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History & Culture, reveals both a sense of understanding that providing space for voices closer to that lived experience displayed in the film is critical in discourse yet risks tokenism towards Aisha and placing the burden of educating others onto people of color (Omi & Winant, 2015). While listening to this conversation I was conflicted: I found myself gravitating towards Aisha's contributions to conversations and I loved when she led episodes, yet I was annoyed that the episode risks framing <u>Small Axe</u> as a film anthology digestible for Black people or people of color alone since those were the voices discussing the movie without the other's involvement. The dynamic of people of color discussing texts about people of color without direct involvement from the wider community mirrors the ways Black or Ethnic Studies Departments exist in academic spaces and even activism with a marginal status tacked on to the broader system and often occupied by folks coded as part of the community (Hayes III, 1994/2007). The norm for *Pop Culture Happy Hour*, and this sample at large, was not to provide such context and participation in alternate histories and Black perspectives for film representations. Rather the norm was loose allusions to culture with a few token discussions from films with undeniable racial themes; observed within <u>Soul</u>, which is unpacked at length in Chapter 4, the racial theme was not <u>strong enough</u> to elicit discourse among the white critics reviewing the movie.

    Pop Culture Happy Hour provided 21 episodes to the sample totaling 444 minutes. The content was released throughout the week, typically Sunday through Thursdays, with no content on Fridays or

Saturdays. The production practices demonstrated general predictability, though with pronounced outliers:

- the average episode length was 21 minutes with a range of 25 minutes
  - The longest episode was the "2020 Pop Culture Favorites" where the hosts ranked and reviewed content from the entire year at 34 minutes long
  - The shortest episode was "2020 Best Books: Realistic Fiction" where the hosts ranked and reviewed the subgenre from the year (not coded in this study as it was not a film review)
  - Most of the film reviews were around 15 minutes
- no episodes included content directly from the audience despite most episodes (78%) inviting listeners to connect and share thoughts on social media
- the episodes followed a simple naming convention with the title of the film or show
  - Once per week, typically on Wednesdays or Thursdays, it added "And What's Making Us Happy" which indicated the episode included recommendations on other pop culture artifacts the hosts were enjoying

Overall, *Pop Culture Happy Hour* followed standard production practices and expectations. It regularly released content throughout the week, resembling practices for traditional journalists and new media bloggers who produce consistent and predictable content streams (Lowrey & Latta, 2008). The hosts of *Pop Culture Happy Hour* are named as "arts journalists" in the podcast description, so they very likely operate with similar routines to traditional journalists and newsroom standards when producing their podcast. Also, *Pop Culture Happy Hour* has resources associated with National Public Radio, and many of the NPR podcasts publish several days a week, which indicates the influence of the organization on the routines of the individual program.

  Pop Culture Happy Hour almost always starts and ends the episodes with an advertising spot, then it typically shares a synopsis of the film in the beginning of the episode followed closely by the hosts' first impressions. It also often provided a recommendation about the film or other media to the

audience, yet it did not interact with or acknowledge the audience often. The hosts primarily mentioned social media with an invitation to "tell us what you think @pchh on Twitter and *Pop Culture Happy Hour* on Facebook" despite rarely engaging directly with the comments, threads, or posts.

The Twitter activity accounted for 28% percent of the total tweets collected in this sample, with 36 total tweets from the @pchh handle. The bulk of the Twitter activity provided a publicity function by teasing the new episode content: for example: "The PCHH Core Four dig way down to the bottom of SOUL: [*link to npr.org*]."

Table 3: Twitter Activity for Pop Culture Happy Hour

Row Labels	Count of Function of Tweet	Average of Likes	Sum of Likes2	Average of Replies	Sum of Replies2	Average of Retweets	Sum of Retweets2
⊟pchh	37	784	29021	7	100.00%	178	100.00%
⊞Audience Interaction	5	5.6	28	0	0.00%	0.4	0.03%
⊞Merchandising	5	22.6	113	0	0.81%	3	0.23%
⊞Publicity	26	1078	28025	9	96.36%	245	96.80%
⊞Show Topics	1	855	855	7	2.83%	193	2.94%
Grand Total	37	784.3513514	29021	6.675675676	100.00%	177.5675676	100.00%

At the time of data collection, the account averaged 784 Likes on the Tweets; however, one tweet heavily skewed the data as an outlier. *Pop Culture Happy Hour* received 20,182 total *Likes* on a promotional tweet for the BTS[17] episode. The BTS fandom is notably active on social media and extremely large. Excluding the BTS tweet, *Pop Culture Happy Hour* received 8,734 Total Likes on the content with an average of 242 Likes per Tweet. The most engaged tweet NOT related to BTS garnered 59 Likes and a couple of comments about The Flight Attendant. The comment thread indicated an intersection of book readers, which is a media segment *Pop Culture Happy Hour* does cater to (on December 13, the episode was dedicated to 2020 Best Books: Realistic Fiction), and this television program.

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[17] BTS is a Korean Pop (K-Pop) group formed in 2013. Spotify reports over 31 million monthly listeners and top songs: Dynamite, Boy with Lauv (ft. Halsey), and Butter.

Figure 8: BTS engagement for Pop Culture Happy Hour on Twitter

The routine for Twitter usage was primarily original content with very few retweets captured in the API. Most of the Twitter content served as publicity for the show, followed by merchandising and audience interaction. The merchandising was exclusive to asking for donations during the NPR fundraising drives, which coincided with the podcast episodes. During the NPR drives, the hosts integrated internal SponCon by reading the donation information and trying to connect with the audience about podcasting from home and needing equipment during the COVID-19 Pandemic. The audience interactions were thank you-s to listeners who tweeted that they had donated. *Pop Culture Happy Hour* does not appear to use the platform to engage the audience in discourse about film: rather the platform was used as an open forum for comments with little moderation from the audio critic and a space to promote the work or produce cultural capital for donors and the economic ties.

Pop Culture Happy Hour receives funding from the National Public Radio structure, which includes sponsorships and crowd donations. Perhaps it does not need to be as directly engaged with the audience or perform the community-building strategies that *Show Me the Meaning* did because of the legacy-backed structure compared to crowd-backed roots. *PCHH* content always played external advertisements where the content was separate from the podcast audio itself. The traditional advertising models rather than the Sponsored Content or internal reading of an advertisement may demonstrate

additional legacy and newsroom routines. News organizations remain influenced by major advertisers who purchase ad space on television networks, magazine pages, newspaper spots, and web banners (Shoemaker & Reese, 2014). It seems that the routine of pre-recorded and overlayed ad spots influences podcast production within the legacy-backed *Pop Culture Happy Hour* production team too. *Pop Culture Happy Hour* also played media-based advertisements that typically recommended other NPR programs, further showing the organization's influence on the content as it is in NPR's interest to keep listeners within the network of content and thus advertiser's radar.

The *Pop Culture Happy Hour* marketing mix reflects affluence for the imagined audience with healthcare, investing, banking, and premium subscription products frequently promoted to the audience. The advertisers with *PCHH* target higher socioeconomic levels with disposable income to be spent investing or purchasing more luxury and non-essential products. These advertising partners show that the NPR and *Pop Culture Happy Hour* audience is imagined as financially stable (banking and investing), in more white-collar careers (Microsoft and Teledoc), and willing to pay for luxury goods (Showtime and books).

The imagined audience reflects demographics collected by the Pew Research Center on those who receive their political news from NPR. Of course, political news is not the same as entertainment and film—I was not able to locate this level of demographic breakdown for NPR podcasts in my search. According to the 2020 survey, 73% of the NPR base are between 30 and 64 years old with 68% holding a college degree (Grieco, 2020). Their listeners tend to be white (75%), which embeds further cultural assumptions about buying power and access alongside real systematic challenges to wealth and technologic divides (Omi & Winant, 2015). We also have histories with explicit discrimination in banking and homeownership, with white applicants receiving better mortgage rates, proximity to better resources education systems, and more suburban locations (Rothstein, 2017). These histories intersect with the reported survey data and the advertisers on the podcast to indicate a heavily white and upper-classed imagined audience for *Pop Culture Happy Hour*. Looking at the generated WordCloud of advertiser or type: banks and investing brands assume listeners own wealth and trust financial

institutions, which is a challenging assumption given the racialized treatment of lending in the U.S.; the Teledoc and Microsoft brands may assume a type of workforce grounded in technology or remote work, which are options more frequent in upper-class positions; and the goods like Gold Label Whiskey, Showtime, and other books or movies again make classed assumptions on affordability and free-time.

Figure 9: Pop Culture Happy Hour promoted brands tied to affluence

The economic mix also includes donations. As a pre-existing listener of NPR content, I anticipated the heavy donation asks during the fundraising drive where most all NPR programs and radio hosts repeatedly ask for financial support. When seeking crowd-based funding, Linda Holmes typically read the donation request with occasional variations to include the other hosts. She did try to make the asks more personal and fun by playing off other podcasts or emphasizing the conditions of COVID that required work from home set-ups. The style of ask might be attributed to the imagined audience who also works from home as members of higher educational attainment, white-collar or office work, and socioeconomic status. The plea for equipment money certainly resonated with me as someone connecting to Zoom and Microsoft Team calls from a spare bedroom while working from home.

> *Linda Holmes, December 3, 2020, 00:24, [Link](#)*
> *I'm Linda Holmes, I am here with Stephen Thompson. Hi Stephen.*
>
> *Stephen*
> *Hello Linda.*

Linda

Buddy it is that time of year again. It is the time of year when we ask you all to help us out and support the work that we do here at NPR. And of course, to do the most important thing of all, Stephen as you know, to beat other podcasts and raise the most money.

Stephen, 00:37

Yeah, I am actually focused on Up First this year. We have had different rivals in past years: All Songs Considered, It's Been A Minute. This year we are gunning for Up First.

Linda, 00:45

That's right. Because are now a daily podcast, so we figure Up First was, they have spent their year doing so much valuable work for everyone, uh we are just going to come and punch them. That is what our plan is. And as you know, you have heard us explain this before. The way that you can support us here at NPR is always to support your local station. If you want to go there, that is how your contribution is getting into the system. That is how they ultimately support us. Our production people, our resources that we have used, especially during the pandemic to be able to bring the show to you, all come through the public radio system. And though you might be listening to us just in podcast world. Stephen, where do they come to make a contribution that can help us, most importantly beat Up First.

Stephen, 1:30

They can go to donate.npr.org/happy. Again, that is donate.npr.org/happy. Don't donate at some other link. This is the link.

Apart from the direct donations during the drive, which ultimately goes into the entire National Public Radio system, *Pop Culture Happy Hour* did not include Patreon or other 3rd Party economic models.

In wrapping up *Pop Culture Happy Hour's* case study analysis, I am drawn to future research topics to extend the findings of this study. *Pop Culture Happy Hour* is part of an extensive legacy-backed network that dominates podcast listenership while maintaining the routines of traditional newsrooms. Future research could dig much further into the routines across NPR with a focus on the production and the economics of the organization's podcast arm. A comparative analysis of the top-performing or most popular NPR podcasts and *PCHH* might illuminate more understanding of the economic influence and listenership imagined by the leading podcast network. *Pop Culture Happy Hour* did not use Twitter or Facebook for much moderation or fostering discourse and could be explored further with the role of community engagement and online comments at the forefront. I would be interested in interviewing the NPR podcast hosts about their practices and attitudes around social media engagement with their

followers and listeners, like Wolfgang, Blackburn, and McConnell (2020) completed with traditional journalists. Lastly, as identified in this case analysis *Pop Culture Happy Hour* recently changed its niche from an interpretive framework into the canonical niche I observed. Additional research to unpack that transition and find what influences pushed the change in production practices to a daily show with less deep-dive interpretive work is viable. *Pop Culture Happy Hour* provided a lot of data to this study and offered a strong point of comparison that ultimately helped me understand how crowd-backed and non-professional audio critics operate in a field filled with podcasting networks.

3.3 The Big Picture

The Big Picture (@TheBigPic) is part of the Ringer Network, an established media production company that specializes in sports and entertainment news. Spotify acquired The Ringer in early 2020 for 196 million dollars (Spangler, 2020), indicative of the value podcast culture presents in the digital age. The Ringer Podcast Network shares a tagline of "Sports. Pop Culture. Podcasts." and it delivers with at least 48 shows (The Ringer, 2021). The Ringer Staff is looking to hire both a podcast manager and a data scientist for podcasts to support the growth and value of their podcast arm (The Ringer, 2021). The Ringer Network reflects similarities to National Public Radio in that it is an organization that values diverse podcast content, provides a mixture of audio and written work, and pays many staff to perform the roles of cultural production. *The Big Picture* is part of an operation with resources to influence and manifest the production routines in legacy ways, and reflects values of the high culture of taste because the routines include access to creators of culture with a strong one-directional communication path between critic and audience (Gans, 1999).

The Big Picture podcast features a rotating panel of media writers and practitioners led by the Ringer Network's head of content, Sean Fennessey (@seanfennessey) and features director Amanda Dobbins (@akdobbins). It has 32,000 Twitter followers in 2021, which reflects a significant growth from the 20,000 at the beginning of this project in Fall 2020. The Ringer Network regularly promotes its own products across its network of podcasts, so the organizational routine may have influenced the growth of visible audiences. This podcast skirts the edges of the trade school traditions with discussions on the

financial and critical success metrics for films; however, the conversation centralized the media production agents far more than audience taste or predicting the audience market for a film. The first episode archived on Spotify is from January 2017, with Sean Fennessey introducing the content as "a very special Channel 33 podcast" that will "over the course of the next few weeks we are going to have conversations with filmmakers, actors, other people involved in the movie industry in the run-up to the awards season" (Sean, January 2017).

The experience of the podcast during the 2020 sampling period maintained the roots of interviewing filmmakers and keeping the industry close to the heart of the conversations. The technical niche emerged as the critics emphasized the means and agents of production in the film industry as the lens of conversation. The hosts tended to frame their reviews with the filmmakers, particularly the directors, at the center. When they covered Citizen Kane[18], Sean, Amanda, and guests Chris Ryan (editorial director at The Ringer) and Adam Nayman (critic and lecturer who writes for The Ringer) spoke at length about the director's career, the various actors, the historical moment of Hollywood during the release, and the legacy of the movie framed within the Academy Award and genre considerations.

Sean, December 1, 2020, 16:42, Link

We are going to talk a lot about Herman Mankowitz, and his claim to authorship of the film, and then ultimately what Mank is about. But Amanda and Chris, I wanted to ask you both, and Amanda you can start. What do you think about the writing and the structure of this movie, which I would say is generally fairly unorthodox?

Amanda, 16:52

Yeah, it is astonishing and electric. And I think you watch it even now in 2020, I think, I am struck and then I learn from people like Adam Nayman about like the technical achievements. I mean it looks different than contemporaneous films and it is accomplished. And so many scenes have become memes at this point. You know that you are seeing something new, but the story telling in terms of, is so sophisticated, in terms of the pacing, in terms of the different perspectives. In terms of how the story is told reflecting what the story itself is. And they made themes from memory to mythology. Or self-anthologizing as the case may be. And it is also so propulsive. This is a character study told from a lot of different people you don't really know in pieces and in flashbacks. And how intracity it is like the puzzle they can't quite put together at the end. I mean it is a little bit on the nose at times, but I enjoy that. And it just moves, and it plays. And you don't, I don't always find that movies from this time period and with this level of intricacy can hold my attention in the same way. And it, and you see something being invented that we are so familiar with now, but it really does hold your attention.

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[18] Citizen Kane, 1941. *Following the death of publishing tycoon Charles Foster Kane, reporters scramble to uncover the meaning of his final utterance; 'Rosebud'.*

Sean, 18:12

Chris, what about you?

Chris, 18:14

There is a story about how Wells, to Amanda's point about films from the era, there is a story about how Wells watched <u>Stagecoach</u> like 40 times while making this movie. And if you watch <u>Stagecoach</u>, which is '39, I think. 1939. It just seems like a different medium. Can you imagine <u>Stagecoach</u> being the source text or the inspiration that Wells was drawing from? And then he goes and makes <u>Citizen Kane</u>, 24 months later. Released like 24 months later. It just feels like this huge leap forward. And it is a leap that I think in a lot of ways people are still trying to wrap their heads around. The thing that, to go back to what I was originally saying, just the first 25 minutes of this movie are like getting, you know, thrown 80 fastballs at once. It is like watching, it is sort of like a hall of mirrors or something. There is the newsreel stuff, then there is the dreamy sort of death sequence, then there is the kind of screwball comedy set in a newsroom. And that is all happening in a movie within the same story. And I would actually love to know what it would have been like to have seen this movie in a theater back when it first came out. And whether or not there were parts of it that you would have kind of understood because you had seen talky comedies from around that era that had this pace. And experimenting with a lot of overlapping dialogue. And you kind of had this ear to process it. Versus some of this stuff that had to have been like, is this real? Like I don't understand, did they scratch the film? How could they do this? There are so many moments in this film, especially in the first hour where you go, I don't understand. Aren't there rules against this? And Wells just blows past those rules.

Adam, 20:02

I think maybe something else, that wasn't lost on people at the time, and definitely wasn't lost on the industry at the time, was of course a lot of amnesty towards the movie. It is not that there hadn't been directors with strong personalities, you mentioned John Ford for instance. And this is not about ranking people, but a lot of John Ford's work holds up equally so. I mean that is the Mount Rushmore of that era. But you hadn't had filmmakers other than comedians, Chaplin, who put themselves into the work. In addition to the expressivity behind the camera. The modern writer, director, star was not invented by Orson Wells. Charlie Chaplin created and pre-dates that. You can go 120 years back. But the modern idea that, the idea of the writer, director, star, and the question of is this vanity? Is this self-criticism? Is this narcissism? Is this about his own persona? Is Orson Wells not just making a movie about Hearst but is this about himself? Is this about his profession and his own promise? How he might see his life. And at a time when Hollywood and media was super interested in celebrity and off screen and gossip. Not that that has changed, but that was really coming into its own in the 1920s, 30s, and 40s. That was a huge part of <u>Citizen Kane</u>.

The way that industry history and a focus on film creators layers through the example above for <u>Citizen Kane</u> held up in most of the episodes. At times, *The Big Picture* focused solely on an actor, such as George Clooney, or a director like Steven Soderbergh, for complete rank and review styles of conversation about their impacts on the production of culture and film. *The Big Picture* tends to describe actors and directors with impact on Hollywood through affirming and idealistic ways because it is "really

passionate about his [Soderbergh] work. So much so that we have collaborated on an <u>Ocean's 11</u> <u>Rewatchables</u>[19] Episode, an <u>Ocean's 12</u> *Rewatchables* episode, a Steven Soderbergh's Top 5 episode, and we have also talked about his work in many episodes of this podcast" (Sean, December 10, 2020, 13:26, <u>Link</u>). Sean and Amanda did frequently rate, rank, and contextualize the careers of the cultural agents connected to the films under discussion.

The Big Picture has produced over 400 episodes and received over 3 thousand ratings on Apple Podcasts. The average rating is a 4.4 Stars with most of the negative reviews citing a dislike of the hosts or their tone when discussing films. The review from BiggestFeesh on January 2, 2021, captures the vibe of most other negative reviews: the tone from the hosts coming across as smug or better than and a tendency to dismiss certain types of media and popular culture. While BiggestFeesh noticed how the conversations revolve around and expand on film culture, they recognized how film culture on the level of comic book fare may not be treated the same legitimacy as other cinema forms.
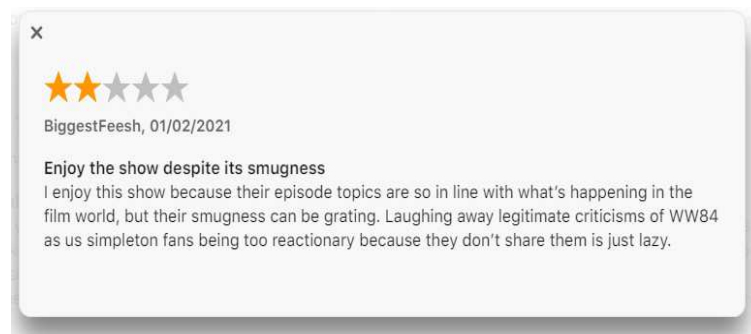
Figure 10: Negative Review for The Big Picture

Looking over the films and episodes chosen by *The Big Picture*, visible traces of the preferred taste culture does appear. It did choose to discuss films and topics that possess higher-level cultural or artistic value such as two full episodes devoted to <u>Mank/Citizen Kane</u> (December 1, 2020, and December

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[19] *The Rewatchables* is another film-centered podcast from The Ringer Network. That program would be a strong case for future studies comparing individual influences within a single organization.

4, 2020), the focus on award-winning directors like Christopher Nolan (December 17, 2020), and the general emphasis on ranking performances in relation to the Best Acting categories for the Oscars (December 8, 2020; December 21, 2020). On December 15 it discussed the future of Hollywood given the pandemic and the already shifting frequency of cinematic universes and franchised intellectual properties compared to independent stories. Sean said that he "has no ill-will towards AMC or Regal or any of these exhibition companies, but the thing that I care about is the smaller repertory theaters and smaller businesses. The people who really care about showing movies on big screens" (18:50, Link). He and Amanda state that they do enjoy going to blockbuster releases with large groups of excited fans, but what he really loves, and desires is going to repertory theaters to see "old films, to see new films, maybe see special events and conversations with artists I care about" (19:55). Amanda shared a similar perspective on taste when she spoke about pop culture franchises in comparison to herself "being a Jane Austen fan, and the relationship to quote Jane Austen content, is the closest I can come to related, really, to a Star Wars fan" (29:15). Amanda positions her taste within classic literature rather than contemporary popular culture. After listening to 16 hours of conversation, I gathered that *The Big Picture's* taste culture aligns far more with sophisticated cinema that receives attention from art houses and the Academy of Arts and Pictures than billion-dollar franchises that draw the masses of popular culture (Gans, 1999).

The audience reviews that cite smugness or complain about the apparent disinterest of *The Big Picture* hosts may not have an emotional need or expectation met, which I noticed other podcasts tap into. An emotional need can be met when audiences are invited into the conversation because of the close relationship that language has provided in our sense of self, identity, and community (Anderson, 2016; Hall, 1980/2012). Traditional criticism maintained a one-way communication path with little invitation for the audience to connect as active in the community through printed works like screening reports, critical essays, and reviews (Corrigan, 2015). The one-way channel reflected the assumption that only elite members of the upper class held the cultural taste required to evaluate films and facilitate discussion on the text (Bourdieu, 1984/2012). *The Big Picture* reflects aspects of this traditional model because it doesn't actively invite or include the audience into the conversations via voicemails or social media. And

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the few times it did include the audience was in a largely negative ways calling out the Twitter discourses as "tweeting Mank puns" (Adam Nayman, December 8, 2020, 89:50, Link), a culture of "gotta have a take, gotta make a meme" (Amanda, December 31, 2020, 6:35, Link), and a culture that "thrives on extremity" (Sean, December 31, 2020, 10:01). It described the tweets and social media discourse around Wonder Woman 1984 as less than and apart from true film criticism—an incident we will cover far more in the Wonder Woman 1984 comparison for 3.6.

The smugness may also come from the connection to a legacy organization, The Ringer Network, and the professionally paid status of the hosts as opinion-providers. The hosts are literally being paid to speak about films to a one-way audience. The claims from some audience members of smugness illuminates the boundaries of the taste culture *The Big Picture* resonates with; someone who desires more active participation in cultural discourse and speaks highly of entertainment mass culture may not gain as much value from the high taste culture that *The Big Picture* aligns within (Gans, 1999). There is an opportunity and space for an audio critic coming from a fandom school or lower taste culture to provide the technical discourse with appreciation and crowd-backing that the listeners who feel the smugness of this podcast may be more attracted towards: in the wide array of film review podcasts available, the theory pushes that products exist to align with those market forces within the fragmented audience sphere. The legacy-backing allowed *The Big Picture* to publish 12 episodes with a sum length of 1,009 minutes in the five weeks of sampling. The average length was over an hour with most episodes including distinct segments such as a discussion of a film and then an interview with a director or actors. These hosts were able to regularly create content as true professionals being paid for their work by their legacy structure while pulling major names in for the interviews such as, Paul Greengrass.

The Big Picture tended to cover a variety of topics in the reviews while acknowledging or interacting with the audience infrequently. It did follow the field-level routine of providing first impressions and a film synopsis early in the episode. The audio critic tended to release content beyond the discreet film review, like the December 2 episode, Did Movie Theaters Just Die? or discussed entire groups of films such as the 1995 Movie Draft on December 29, 2020. *The Big Picture* led to an emerging

genre form of film review in the audio critic space, the Rank and Review episode. It was not the only

critic in this sample to rank multiple texts of a particular cluster, but it did do this most frequently. The

Rank and Review genre will be further explored in Chapter 4.

On Twitter, *The Big Picture* was active with 109 tweets collected through the API. It received a

lot of engagement, averaging 280 Likes, 33 replies, and 55 Retweets from the community over the

sampling period. Despite the community being visibly engaged with *The Big Picture*, the audio critic

rarely responded back to the fans from the main account. At times, individual hosts would respond to a

few comment threads. Sean, who was more active than Amanda, clarified that social media is "a fact of

life and a reflection of the ways people are engaging with this stuff that does matter to me" (December 31,

2020, 38:12). Based on the conversations, it is likely that Sean and Amanda monitor their Twitter

accounts and the @thebigpic account as lurkers to see "the way that people receive, consume, and then

process popular culture" (Sean, December 31, 2020, 38:20). Being within a legacy structure may also

mean the organization's Twitter activity, @thebigpic, is managed by other staff. More than other cases in

the sample, *The Big Picture* relied on retweets of content frequently. They often retweeted content posted

by Sean, Amanda, or other Ringer Network personalities, demonstrating some of the influence the

organization has because *The Big Picture* helped promote in-organization content.

Table 4: Twitter Activity for The Big Picture

Row Labels	Count of Function of Tweet	Average of Likes	Sum of Likes2	Average of Replies	Sum of Replies2	Average of Retweets	Sum of Retweets2
⊟TheBigPic	109	281	30575	34	100.00%	55	100.00%
⊞Audience Interaction	26	47	1209	3	2.05%	1	0.53%
⊞Customer Service	1	0	0	0	0.00%	0	0.00%
⊞Engagement	7	140	979	232	44.51%	80	9.38%
⊞General	7	323	2259	11	2.16%	8	0.88%
⊞Publicity	32	135	4323	15	13.41%	10	5.41%
⊞Recommendation	12	534	6407	48.5	15.92%	96	19.17%
⊞Show Topics	24	642	15398	33	21.94%	162	64.62%
Grand Total	109	280.5045872	30575	33.53211009	100.00%	55.08256881	100.00%

The Big Picture spreads out its Twitter usage with far more routines of retweets and varied

content. The function of Twitter was spread between among all the themes with Publicity (35%) and

Show Topics (26%) leading the distribution. When *The Big Picture* connected directly with the audience

on Twitter, the tweets were typically "thank you" responses to community members related to the Spotify

Yearly Wrap Up. The audience interactions may not be a routine behavior if Spotify had not released the

social-sharing features of listener plays during the sampling period. The top five most engaged tweets included memes or graphics related to the film industry or a film, which mirrors the descriptions of what *The Big Picture* perceives Twitter to be for. It had described online culture as a place for takes and memes, reinforced by the popularity of the takes and memes. The most liked tweet was about HBO Max with over 3, 200 Likes on December 3, 2020. Other popular tweet types were list graphics with movie titles or recommendations for the audience, such as the Top 5 Movies lists with 500+ Likes from December 9.

Figure 11: The Big Picture received engagement on Twitter for industry memes.

The Big Picture receives funding from the Ringer Network, via ad revenue. *The Big Picture* content always included ads for products and brands with very little personal engagement. The ads were clearly scripts, often reoccurring across episodes, indicating an external recording that could be replayed. The ads typically played at the beginning of episodes and at transition points, like when ending the film

review and moving into the interview portion of the episode. These ads almost always had background music to them, which further distinguished the advertisement from the formal content. The structure often reminded me of radio routines that break program segments up with commercials; the broadcast-esk practice reflects a social system-level routine for media industries with advertisers tightly controlling the message and placement within programming (Shoemaker & Reese, 2014). The sponsors likely rotate on time-based contracts because the same brands appeared throughout the month of my sampling period. Additional research on The Ringer and other legacy-backed critics can question the economic patterns over a longer period. Sampling from various points in the year can shed more light on the routines for market integration within the podcast space.[20]

 The Big Picture might imagine the audience as more affluent and interested in spending disposable income on technology related products. It was sponsored by battery companies, Duracell, and Energizer, indicating the need to power electronics or forms of digital toys. It is surprising that competing brands would market on the same show. The phenomenon occurred again with two car brands holding ad space on *The Big Picture*. Perhaps the overlap of competitors speaks to the stage that podcasting is in as an emerging and valuable field for marketing to consumers. Only a portion of brands are actively integrating podcasts into their marketing mix despite reportedly high conversation rates compared to digital or TV ads (Zaidi, 2021). The appeal of podcast advertising and the hyper-fragmentation of the space may drive competitors to the same podcasts if they imagine the listenership to match their target markets. *The Big Picture* also advertised for other Spotify podcasts, as Spotify owns the network. When they didn't run formal ad spots for Spotify podcasts, the hosts integrated shout-outs to their Ringer Network colleagues such as *The Rewatchables* (another movie podcast) and *Binge Mode* (television and film).

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[20] In early 2021 Spotify released a Beta feature for ads that impacts The Ringer Network podcasts. They now list the advertising sponsor with a time stamp to indicate how much is left in the ad. I noticed it on other Ringer podcasts I personally listened to, and when I returned to *The Big Picture* while writing the analysis found that this feature had replaced the ad structure and content observed in December of 2020.

Figure 12: The Big Picture featured the same brands heavily focused on home goods

The Big Picture was one of the more insightful towards the film industry of the sample. The technical niche facilitated emphasizes the industry and culture of production around cinema. Sean and Amanda often made this point in episodes while they discussed economic data, distribution trends, critic reception, and the future for Hollywood.

> *Sean, December 1, 2020, 28:19,* <u>*Link*</u>
>
> *George Schaefer, who was running RKO at the time, sought out* [Orson] *Wells because he was trying to elevate the quality of films they were making at the studio. And that is part of the reason they agreed to give him the deal* [to make <u>Citizen Kane</u>]. *And Wells hit his marks, so to speak. He really did make the movie that he promised, and on time. And the reception of the movie is really interesting because there were, there was, one class of columnist and critic that widely celebrated it, and they were often employed by Henry Luce who was, of course, oppositional to William Randolph Hearst….and on the other side you got all these gossip columnists who are trying to undermine Wells. You have also got the Academy, which hadn't, I think very interestingly their approach to the film was to celebrate it but withhold. And the movie gets nine Oscar nominations including Best Picture but only wins one Oscar. And that Oscar is of course Best Screenplay.*

> *Amanda, December 17, 2020, 37:51*
>
> *Tenet did not do well at the Box Office. And obviously there are a lot of exceptions and reasons why and it is all very complicated. It is 2020***. But it is interesting that he* [Christopher Nolan] *was in the center of the frame this year. And I think that he is in the center of the conversation about what the movie industry will be moving forward because of the types of movies that he makes and how he wants people to see them and how people have traditionally seen them. And how they are financed and how they will be financed going forward.*

Sean articulated the point and reason for the consistent attention to the box office and the business of Hollywood concisely towards the end of the sample.

> *Sean, December 31, 2020, 38:34,* <u>*Link*</u>

Whenever people say to me, like what do you care about this stuff? Why do you have the business stuff on this show? I always say the same thing: I am interested in what we are getting next. The things that are successful drive the conversation for the where the future of the medium and the art form goes.

The centering and elevating the practices of production define the technical niche that emerged from the sample. *The Big Picture* embodies this niche as proponents of the Hollywood business and how that context directly influences the reception and discourse of film criticism. As the niche is more focused on the industry, the audience is not often included directly in conversation but rather treated as one-directional consumers of the audio critic's opinions and industry context. *The Big Picture* used Twitter as an open forum for the audience to respond or engage with each other while rarely moderating the conversations. The scope of this study focused on the film reviews, and *The Big Picture* offers a case for additional research through the interviews hosted and other types of art-related content created. The Ringer Network also offers a strong site for research on entertainment and popular culture journalism, discourse, and community as well.

3.4 Black Girl Film Club

Black Girl Film Club (@blckgirlfilmclub) is a crowd-backed podcast with a forming cultural capital of 1,200 Twitter followers, 300 Instagram followers, and 80 episodes published. The Twitter followers grew by about 200 between Fall of 2020 and the final write up in 2021. The hosts, Ashley Ayer (@ashleyayer) and Britney Brinson (@its_britney), are professionals in other fields who record this podcast every other week with little visible funding. Ashley is a graphic designer and art director out of Dallas (her studio is [currently "shut down"](#)) and describes herself as a film newbie, learning from and connecting with her friend Britney who is a freelance writer. *Black Girl Film Club* was launched in 2018 after the duo noticed the treatment of women's reviews in spaces like Letterboxd and didn't feel welcomed. The podcast reflects lower middle class taste culture to make artistic form more accessible and to speak to members not typically included or with access to high and upper-middle class pathways to content (Gans, 1999). Ashley described their motivation as "I wish there was a place where me and my friends could just talk about movies. We don't need to have anyone explain the movie to me because I

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watched the movie. I know what I felt, I know what I thought, and I know how I interpreted it. I don't

need anybody else to tell me" (CTSJ Events, 2020). Britney added that many films from Black creators

or featuring aspects of Black communities were misrepresented in film podcast culture as bad films. She

added that they created *Black Girl Film Club* because

> *I noticed that sometimes they* [Black films] *are bad because something is missing with the cultural nuances. You are not able to connect to some of the culture because the podcasters are not part of the culture. And it is just something missing and a disconnect. And I was thinking to myself, well they are missing something, so if I hosted a podcast this movie is not a bad movie it is just that you are not getting the references made here. And if I was a podcast host, I would be able to explain or be able to relate to the material a little bit better. And I wanted to have a platform where I could discuss a little bit more in-depth.*

Notably, *Black Girl Film Club* did not cover Black directed or Black led films for this sample; however, a

limited number of episodes were captured because of the longer production schedule. The first episode in

February 2018 covered House Party, directed by Reginald Hudlin who has served as president for Black

Entertainment Television (BET). *Black Girl Film Club* offers a strong site for continued research with a

method that collects data across the episode archive to illuminate discourse with racial and cultural

salience. During the mailbag segment on December 18, a community member wrote in about a prior

episode on Queen & Slim[21], which was directed by Melina Matsoukas and features Daniel Kaluuya and

Jodie Turner-Smith in the leading roles. The talent and the story primarily represent Black cinema. The

engagement from the listener and the response indicates how, over a more substantial sampling period,

the movie selection and discourse may trend towards interpreting and centering Black art.

> *Ashley, December 18, 2020, 142:36*
> *He says, ay' yo Ashley and Britney. This is Mike from New York. He says, a real cathartic listen—because that film was trash—but beautifully looking flick with wasted potential. Not sure how the most interesting part of this movie would be the PTSD military vet, "pimp" whose women feel sorry for him. But the film came alive once they came to New Orleans. And he directed this at me, Ashley, you broke my heart, because you know the movie, Dope. He says they yadda, yadda'd the third act, but it is still a solid watch. What is the deal? I am interested to hear your criticism.*

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[21] Queen & Slim, 2019. *A couple's first date takes an unexpected turn when a police officer pulls them over.*

After Britney and Ashley thank "Michael" for his letter and banter with each other about how much they

appreciate hearing from listeners, Ashley expands on her response to the letter about <u>Dope</u>[22].

> *Ashley 144:55*
> *The reason that I don't like this movie was, that, it just falls into one of those try-hard movies for me a little bit, along with <u>Dear White People</u> and <u>Queen & Slim</u>. It just feels like it was made for a particular type of viewer. It mostly comes down to the goofy shit like his band being called Oreo because they are Black on the outside and white on the inside because they like punk music or whatever the fuck else…Also I just, there was just something else that felt very #message about it at the end. I can't really remember but it just like put me off of it. I guess the overall plot is not terrible, them going on this weird Ferris Bueller type adventure. I didn't really have a problem with that. It was more the little shit like his band and the actor who was definitely not Black, I mean he said he was like a quarter Black or whatever, saying nigger and shit. Like what exactly are we trying to accomplish here? So, I feel like the first time I watched it I liked it. And then I rewatched it and I was like, no this is not for me.*

> *Britney, 146:50*
> *Yeah. I watched it once and wasn't interested enough to watch it again.*

Black Girl Film Club clearly engages with texts that speak towards Black communities, and I am

interested to hear more of its thoughts as it interprets the films and references. The hosts were featured on

a YouTube panel hosted by the Critical Theory and Social Justice Department at the Occidental College

in Los Angeles, and they fielded questions like "what are your thoughts about the relationship between

this digital moment and the discussion and production of Black film." In their responses, they spoke on

the importance of Black creatives being able to connect with each other more readily. They also

dialogued with the CTSJ faculty about representation in the media in texts such as <u>Candyman</u>[23] and the

histories of racism and persisting systemic oppressions in the United States (CTSJ Events, 2020).

Interpretive critics within the middle taste cultures present strong sites for both scholars and community

members to find consciousness raising and activist practice. *Black Girl Film Club* uses mass

communication technologies to present and participate in the education and discovery of alternate

experiences and readings on media products (Kershaw, 1992/2007). If a space exists where audio critics

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[22] <u>Dope</u>, 2015. *Life changes for Malcolm, a geek who's surviving life in a tough neighborhood, after a chance invitation to an underground party leads him and his friends into a Los Angeles adventure.*

[23] <u>Candyman</u>, 2021. *A sequel to the horror film Candyman (1992) that returns to the now-gentrified Chicago neighborhood where the legend began.*

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raise the consciousness of the public and enact a Black Studies praxis, it would be with podcasts who

center alternate readings and texts while attempting to engage the audience into the discourse and connect

across the network of media content while bridging the space between academics and the general public.

More attention to the work of *Black Girl Film Club* and other interpretive niches of audio criticism is

fully warranted within the lens of activism and hegemonic resistance.

    Black Girl Film Club is finding its audience and building the archive of episodes up. It has 83

episodes released through mid-2021 with 28 total ratings so far. It received a 4.6 Stars on Apple Podcasts

from the ratings. All the posted reviews are extremely positive, and the comments are turned off on the

YouTube interview they did, so it is difficult to tell why it received the few negative ratings and scores.

The long run time and storyteller style might be outside of the expectations for most audiences, based on

the run-time reviews for *Mostly Nitpicking* that also spanned multiple hours. The content regularly

exceeded two hours and based on comments for the other cases in this study run-time is a barrier for

some listeners. At times, the length of the content and the need to adjust the sound volume throughout the

episode presented a challenge to listening for me. The microphones were not always adjusted so that

Ashley would be much louder than Britney, or vice versa. In the Year in Review episode, they

mentioned looking for more sponsors and plan to improve their podcast overall, which might help foster

and sustain listeners. The independence of *Black Girl Film Club* from a network or organization presents

logistical challenges for the creators compared to the well-resourced and professional producers that *The

Big Picture*, *Pop Culture Happy Hour*, and *Show Me the Meaning* receive. More research on the

production and audience reception of independent audio critics in the competitive market space is

warranted.

    Black Girl Film Club connects with the emerging community with many of the reviews citing

how the hosts' personalities shine through. Micro-celebrities, such as podcast hosts, use strategies to

build their persona and foster a sense of authenticity to resonate with listeners (Marshall, 2013; McRae,

2017; Ryan, 2019). The hosts offered more insight into their personal lives as a strategy to connect. First,

Britney spoke openly about her medical condition with migraines and seizures. She provided a warning

for the listeners about seizures and how painful watching the films can be due to her condition.

> *Britney, November 30, 2020, 124:37, [Link](#)*
>
> *So, I don't think I have talked about it on the show, for real, for real. So, let's take a moment to tell everyone that is listening that I have a disability. I guess that is what it would be classified as. Yeah, it is a disability. So, I have chronic migraines. I have talked about those, and they are severe. So, they can be triggered by flashing lights, so I have to be very careful. So, for example one time when I went to see It Part 2, which is very upsetting because it has flashing lights and is trash. I got very ill. So, I wish I had known beforehand. So, putting warnings on movies is important because if I had known, and if I had known the movie is garbage, I wouldn't have gotten sick. In the theater it is a little worse because it is dark. So, when the lights flash, closing my eyes won't help because you can still see it since the whole theater is dark. And at home I can have the lights on to watch it in better conditions or fast forward through it to a different point where the flashing lights have stopped.*

I was struck by the vulnerability shared because she went on to explain that "she had a seizure after

watching It," which as with most disabilities, we don't hear about often. And then Ashley showed the

outside-Hollywood positioning of the niche, compared to critics like *The Big Picture* who celebrate

systems of production, by adding "maybe one day they will start putting stuff on there; however, if you

ask a director to do anything or warn anybody about anything in their movie, they get all pissy. So, ya

know" (128:05). The vulnerability and attitude help shape and show the audience more personality than

traditional or legacy-backed critics. The attitude also fosters more intimacy and brings the listener into the

conversation rather than positioning the critic as above or apart from the community. Future research as

Black Girl Film Club, and other crowd-backed critics, grow would provide insight on if the balance of

personal content and personality to formal discussions changes due to economic or organizational

influences.

Secondly, *Black Girl Film Club* acknowledged mistakes or problematic aspects in conversation—

leaving those learning moments in for the audience to hear and engage with. During the episode on

Batman Returns[24] on December 18, 2020, Ashley spoke insensitively about disabilities. It was discussing

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[24] Batman Returns, 1992. *While Batman deals with a deformed man calling himself the Penguin wreaking havoc across Gotham with the help of a cruel businessman, a female employee of the latter becomes the Catwoman with her own vendetta.*

the character, Oswald—the villain Batman villain Penguin—who is characterized in the film by his fused

middle, ring, and pinky fingers. Britney brings up that "this film has a lot to do with ableism, bro" (40:10,

Link). After the context on Oswald's hands, Ashley says "yeah he has got fused fingers. You can get that

fixed." The statement is nearly cut off with a jingle tone and "editing" Ashely providing an

acknowledgement and apology.

> *Ashley, 40:54*
> *Hey y'll, it is Ashley, editing Ashley here in the future putting together this week's episode.*
> *This right here is a good example of what not to say or terms that are not the best to use. For*
> *example, people with disabilities, people who are born with disabilities, people who develop*
> *disabilities later on in life. They don't need to be "fixed." We don't need to fix anything about*
> *them. And so, you know, that term isn't really the best to use. But I am leaving it in this week,*
> *so not editing it out. Not to be like, oh look at me doing the right thing, but just to show you*
> *what not to do. And you know just be mindful of how you speak about people with disabilities.*
> *And of course, Britney checks me on it a little bit, in literally like the next five seconds.*

Rather than cutting the content, *Black Girl Film Club* chose to leave the original comment in the episode

with Ashley going back in post-production and recording an unpacking of what she did wrong and

learned from it. As she mentioned, Britney did check her on the original by pushing Ashley to remember

that "[it could be fixed] if Oswald wanted to" since his family does have money. I didn't see this visible

trace of how to respond to a mistake from the other critics, and I was struck by the potential the work

could do in the discourse. Media experiences, particularly when positive and interesting, can increase the

attention to and motivation for processing additional information on the context and foster certain

attitudes and behaviors (DiMaggio, 1997; Schemer, 2012). *Black Girl Film Club*, more than the others,

felt like a brave and safe learning space for the interpretive community to grow and become more

enlightened together through the modeling of behaviors and entertaining education. The learning space

also clearly aligned within the interpretive niche as it grounded challenging topics and interpretations of

films in highly accessible ways. The interpretive niche may have great utility in increasing cultural

sensitivity if aligned towards an entertainment-education model that fosters attitudes and behaviors from

the listener with less cognitive resistance through mechanisms of identification, parasocial relationships,

transportation, and absorption into the story (Green, et. al, 2008; Murphy, Frank, Moran & Patnoe-

Woodley, 2011; Nabi & Moyer-Guse, 2012; Slater & Rouner, 2002). The way the interpretive niche manifested for *Black Girl Film Club* is distinct from the interpretive niche of *Show Me the Meaning*—both accomplish a similar purpose of bringing high-level and abstract topics down into accessible discourse; however, one speaks much more directly to friends while the other maintains a sense of academic positioning.

The community for *Black Girl Film Club* does not receive many episodes in a month, but when we do receive content, we get a lot of listening minutes. It released four episodes, with one being pulled outside the sampling period on January 22, 2021. The smaller scale of the production schedule compared to the other audio critics highlights the influence of organizational backing and support and the challenges of producing content without those resources. While it recorded fewer total podcasts, it released much lengthier episodes than most of the sample. *Black Girl Film Club* recorded for 568 total minutes with an average length of 142 minutes, indicative of the storyteller style.

While in the field, I did not have a good sense of when new episodes would be released, often opening Spotify to a surprise: however, the end of the week (Thursday or Friday) were the most common release days.

- the average episode length was 142 minutes with a range of 37

- all the film episodes included the audience with frequent acknowledgments to the podcast culture and invitations to connect

Black Girl Film Club covered many topics, or prefaces, in its episodes. It does follow the field routines of providing first impressions and a synopsis of the movie; however, the elements are more layered into discussions and personal reflections with expanded context compared to the other audio critics. It also tended to wrap up its episodes by including an email received or mentioning the social media accounts. *Black Girl Film Club* was one of the more engaged audio critics on Twitter, which may reflect the smaller community and self-managed accounts outside of an organization's oversight.

The Twitter activity accounted for 23% percent of the total tweets collected in this sample with 29 total tweets from the @blkgirlfilmclub handle. *Black Girl Film Club* used Twitter often as well with a

routine of visuals and retweets. The bulk of the Twitter activity were general tweets about holidays—

including Denzel Washington's birthday—and gifs or memes. @blkgirlfilmclub also tweeted in the Show

Topics category, which didn't directly promote the new episodes but did add more context, often with

screenshots, to the films discussed. On Instagram, it followed a similar routine with photos from the films

it discussed driving the content. Again, the organizational influence on the Twitter activity was

illuminated as it did not rely on as much publicity and marketing compared to the larger networked cases.

It seems *Black Girl Film Club* has more freedom in what it posts and presents a question for future

research into organizational differences between crowd-backed and legacy-backed audio critics across

industries.

Table 5: Twitter Activity for Black Girl Film Club

Row Labels	Count of Function of Tweet	Average of Likes	Sum of Likes2	Average of Replies	Sum of Replies2	Average of Retweets	Sum of Retweets2
⊟blkgirlfilmclub	40	31	1206	8	100.00%	670	100.00%
⊞Audience Interaction	5	4	18	1	0.98%	0	0.01%
⊞Engagement	1	6	6	1	0.33%	1	0.00%
⊞General	13	84	1009	23	96.72%	1893	91.78%
⊞Publicity	5	4	21	1	0.98%	3	0.05%
⊞Recommendation	8	18	141	0.375	0.98%	273	8.13%
⊞Show Topics	8	1	11	0	0.00%	1	0.02%
Grand Total	40	31	1206	8	100.00%	670	100.00%

The *Black Girl Film Club* community, though small, was active with the most likes on general and

publicity type posts. But the activity was usually fewer than 10. The most liked tweet referenced the

COVID-19 Pandemic and how impactful the social distance restrictions have been for film goers. The

tweet also has an obscenity, "fucked up," again indicating the potential freedom from organizational

influences the hosts have over the content; however, most of the audio critics used scattered obscenities,

which may speak to the more intimate and relaxed nature of podcasting as a medium. The language and

likes on this post speak to the interpretive niche *Black Girl Film Club* facilitates, which pushes content

grounded in common language. Clearly the audience resonated with the sentiment Adam Sandler's

character in Uncut Gems is feeling and endorsed by *Black Girl Film Club*: the 2020 period was a fucked-up time for films and culture—and that is the simplest way to interpret what happened that year.

Figure 13: Black Girl Film Club expressed itself through images on Twitter.

        Black Girl Film Club was also active on Instagram with similar behavior to the Twitter account. The Instagram and Twitter handles are slightly different with Twitter eliminating the "a" and "c" from Black. It typically posted a photo from the film with the episode number, the film title and year, and the Twitter handle. If it didn't post the episode publicity art, it was posting shots from a previous week's film or a timely and relevant photo such as Idris Elba decorating a Christmas tree on December 25. *Black Girl Film Club* also remained active in directly engaging with the community. When sankara.writing asked for recommendations on the Natural Born Killers post, it responded *off the top of my head I think of Romeo + Juliet, but maybe try The Doom Generation?* reflecting the initial mission of the show to be a space where friends could talk about and engage with movies.

Figure 14: Black Girl Film Club engagement on Instagram

Ashley told us she is "pretty active on Letterboxd. Talking a lot of shit, usually" (December 31, 5:40, Link), so I investigated her profile. Letterboxd was created for film critics to provide reviews, yet I did not find the other hosts active on this platform. Letterboxd offers research potential into the average film review, like prior research on Rotten Tomatoes but with more individually trackable data. Ashley has watched over 1,300 films and has a followship of fans who receive notifications about the reviews she makes. Not many of the reviews matched the content for the podcast, so Ashley may be cultivating a slightly separate community here.
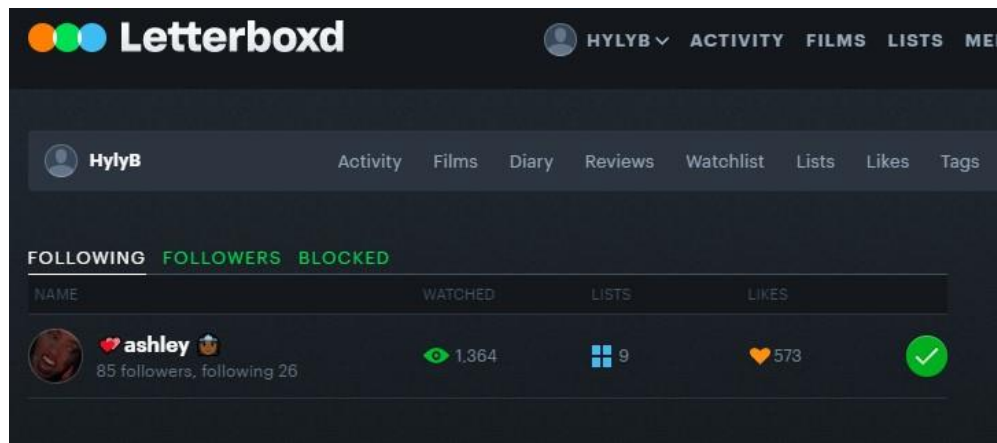
Figure 15: Letterboxd profile for Ashley from Black Girl Film Club

Black Girl Film Club operates primarily with aspirational labor, rather than generating sustainable revenue from the podcast, as the hosts hold alternative professional careers. It described how

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much effort goes into trying to make this podcast work because "it is just us two. We don't have anybody. We don't have a super huge, monstrous, corporate backing that is like here we will do all the work for you" (Ashley, December 31, 2020, 9:45, Link). Sullivan (2018) describes aspirational labor in the podcasting sphere as "free labor offered in the hope or expectation of future (monetary) benefit" (p. 37). The aspirational labor force has led to a formalization of the podcasting economy with networks and financially successful models growing across podcast topics. As Ashley acknowledged, the formalization of the industry and backing from larger groups takes some of the labor off the hosts themselves. Podcasters recognize the potential, and this study points towards the economic availability for the legacy-backed critics and for crowd-funding with a large enough audience base. The economics of *Black Girl Film Club* was nearly missed within the case study because it is less formalized than the other audio critics.

Black Girl Film Club receives funding from a sponsor, Super Yaki, which is a film-themed apparel brand who partners with small podcasts. I was not aware it had a sponsorship because of the lack of visible traces until the Year in Review episode where Ashley and Britney discussed finally finding a sponsor. After hearing that name, I returned to my notes from the Twitter data and discovered a shout-out to the sponsoring brand. The @blkgirlfilmclub handle did retweet content from @superyakistuff in late November, but I assumed at the time it was an audience member or random interaction. The episodes do not include market integration or regularly reference Super Yaki within the conversations or the episode descriptions, which is unusual activity in sponsorship agreements. The Super Yaki website also lacked strong promotion of the *Black Girl Film Club* brand, so unpacking any influence or economic contexts is challenging within the scope of this study. It does bring up future research questions for the prevalence of silent sponsors within crowd-backed audio critics, which may need to be investigated through interview protocols. *Black Girl Film Club*, while considered crowd-backed because the production is more crowd driven than pushed by a legacy model, didn't ask for donations from the audience. I could not find a Patreon or other donation-based site for *Black Girl Film Club*, making it a crowd-backed organization

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with social or cultural capital rather than fiscal support at the time of research. As it grows, perhaps it will begin seeking more revenue to cash in the aspirational labor generating social capital.

A final point about *Black Girl Film Club* for future research and insight was the film selection. Most of the critics in this sample focused on newer films or items trending on streaming platforms, which reflects a routine from journalism in gatewatching that focuses on current events or follows what the audience may have top of mind (Bruns, 2008; Shoemaker & Reese, 2014). Instead, this critic tends to select older films, which offers an opportunity to explore collective memory and post-interpretations of films outside of the context they were created. Audio critics, like journalists, are members in an interpretive community that negotiates the narratives of events and reinterprets the meaning to larger audiences (Berkowitz & TerKeurst, 1999; Zelizer, 1993). The work on collective memory and nostalgia in connecting to a version of the past while reflecting through present contexts might be well-applied to work on audio critics like *Black Girl Film Club* who don't necessarily follow a routine of new releases in a study with a larger scope to compare discourses over time. Collective memory work should also intersect with critical race, gender, and queer scholarship to unpack the values of the time via the film texts and the responses to those films via the podcast discourse to identify where reinforcement or opposition to the hegemonic values existed in context. Films are cultural artifacts that can be recirculated and interpreted over time to reinforce or negotiate the values of society. Audio critics could be studied through a theoretical lens of how they discuss past films and may serve as nostalgia engines that facilitate contemporary discourses about the past state of culture.

Listening to *Black Girl Film Club* was the very first episode of the sampling period and my introduction to what became the storyteller role. I had not seen the film it first reviewed; Natural Born Killers from 1994. Even though I still have not seen this film, I can tell you exactly what happens in high detail because of the episode released. And I followed along easily with the films I had seen, like Batman Returns, because it hit the narrative beat by beat. Storytellers, which *Mostly Nitpicking* uses as its style too, tend to provide nearly beat by beat explanations and descriptions of the films they review while layering in thoughts, contexts, factoids, and commentary. The effort required to watch, record, edit, and

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distribute multi-hour episodes is high—though entertaining for the audience as demonstrated by the reviews applauding the fun "recaps." *Black Girl Film Club* operates on aspirational labor despite the heavy because Ashley and Britney wanted a space where friends could talk openly and accessibly about their interpretations of film. While few episodes are produced, each delivered on that promise. *Black Girl Film Club* used social media to directly connect with the audiences and offered personal and sincere moments to allow their interpretive community of listeners to learn, grow, and feel comfortable engaging with films.

3.5 Mostly Nitpicking

Mostly Nitpicking (@nitpickingpod) is a crowd-backed audio critic made up of three friends who share their feelings and experiences with films. *Mostly Nitpicking* was selected to represent the populist tradition because it can appear, based on the description, that it considers entertainment and the audience above critical or intellectual thought (McWhirter, 2016); however, it does demonstrate a comical and frequent disregard for audience feedback while layering in socio-political commentary. It represented a hidden gem of thoughtful cultural awareness snuck between mostly wandering conversations and inside jokes. *Mostly Nitpicking* aligns most readily with low culture taste because of the emphasis on entertainment, actions, and emotional enjoyment over the creators, artistic recommendations, and meaning more aligned with higher tastes (Gans, 1999). The content was the most accessible in terms of language, included the most cursing and goofy in-jokes, and attracted no external funding or marketing beyond donations from the community itself. Understanding and engaging with *Mostly Nitpicking* brought the flexibility of taste cultures into focus. A taste culture describes the qualities unifying texts and discourse around media, while the taste public represents the people who choose the culture. While often people opt-in to the taste culture through their education, profession, class status, and other material influences on what texts and spheres they have access to, it is not certain that is the culture that will resonate (Gans, 1999, p. 168). While cultural satisfaction and reward is more associated with someone choosing a higher taste culture than aligns with their experiences, I found the opposite. *Mostly Nitpicking* was my favorite podcast and community, meaning I belong to a far lower taste public than my education

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and profession would dictate. Of course, I also gain satisfaction and have access to high and upper-middle class cultures: still there is no denying, the affective niche in this low culture was my favorite. That favoritism relates to my primary use of media grounded in escapism and entertainment along with my high need for parasocial bonding. The reasons why audiences choose the audio critic and the niche they do is worth extensive research through the lens that Gans and others working in taste and audience reception have put forth including revisions to uses and gratifications (Rubin, 2009).

The combination of feelings and commentary led to the recognition of the affective niche for reviews. In the affective niche, the critic spends most of the conversation focused on emotional thoughts and feelings rather than interpreting what is happening for the audience. The line between an interpretive niche and an affective niche can be slight, as *Black Girl Film Club* also dabbled into each: the defining line is in how seriously it takes the films. *Mostly Nitpicking* led to the emergence of the Logic Interrogation genre as the primary purpose of every conversation was to roast the narrative, the mechanics, and internal logic of the film. As they say in every opening line "I'm Nando, I'm DJ, and I'm Diggins. And this is *Mostly Nitpicking*: a podcast where every week we pick apart a piece of pop culture by looking exclusively at the details. WOOOOOOOOOO." The interpretive niche provides more direct critiques of the film and culture. The meaning of the affective niche is exemplified by one host's explanation of his experience with Tenet[25] on December 23, 2020.

> *Nando, 38:35, Link*
> *I wouldn't tell anyone to go out of their way to see this the way that I would almost any other Christopher Nolan movie. Even like Interstellar, which I am also not the biggest fan of. But I think still works better than this. I guess I am right in between both of you where, like Diggins, I can appreciate the machinery and just the spectacle and execution of it. Very Similar to Diggins. But I guess I just found it really unenjoyable because of how bored I was with everything else. It would be like if I had to watch a two-hour high dive routine or something.*
>
> *DJ, 39:16*
> *I would enjoy that more.*

---

[25] Tenet, 2020. *Armed with only one word, Tenet, and fighting for the survival of the entire world, a Protagonist journeys through a twilight world of international espionage on a mission that will unfold in something beyond real time.*

Nando

It would be impressive, and I would be like 'wow they are still doing it two hours later. Wow.' But if I don't know what is going on or I don't have any investment in any of the characters, then I don't [enjoy it]. *The only time I could ever be invested in one of the characters is at the end of the movie. So besides that, there is no like, oh yeah, you know what I hope he wins. So, it's not that I think it is a terrible movie. I mean it is not the movie that is going to save cinema. Do you think Christopher Nolan thought it was his best movie ever made?*

This conversation moves on into a discussion of Christopher Nolan, emphasizing how quickly the audio critic moves from topic to topic as the train of thought shifts. It can produce an effective affective niche conversation because it features three close friends talking about their random thoughts, their big questions, and their flexible commentary on a film. They are not constrained by time limits or larger organizational, professional pressures.

The three hosts, Mathew Kelly—known as Nando (@nandovmovies), DJ Chapman (@zippybyday), and Chris Diggins (@thisisanoddname) offered a unique listening experience: the type that comes from being among close friends rather than colleagues. The experience was near *Black Girl Film Club*; however, Ashley and Britney met online and built a friendship through discussing films. The *Mostly Nitpicking* hosts live in the same Philadelphia/New Jersey/New York area and conversed in ways that felt further back and deeper. Their style of joking and jovial meanness signaled a longer friendship than Ashley and Britney's slightly more collegial interactions. Nando serves as the facilitator of the conversation and speaks the most—his voice became a familiar comfort. Additionally, having three hosts instead of a twosome dynamic may lead to differences in communication style for crowd-backed critics. The other critics with a group, *Show Me the Meaning* and *Pop Culture Happy Hour*, maintained structures for turn-taking and facilitation that evoke professional training and influence compared to friend-group interactions.

Nando also runs the YouTube channel Nando v. Movies with over 250,000 subscribers that rewrites movies with "one small change" and shows his understanding of script writing. He opens and closes each episode and provides the structure for both individual episodes and the trajectory of the podcast itself. In the first episode of the sample, Nando explained the plan for the next month of content, demonstrating his consistent position as the leader.

Nando, December 4, 2020, 2:10, [Link](#)

So, we got a <u>Christmas Chronicle</u> sequel has come out, which you can watch right now. So, we are going to do that. <u>Tenet</u> is getting a home release on the 14th or 15th I think of December.

DJ

Yup. Gotta do <u>Tenet</u>.

Nando

Yup. Who knows if it is any good or not? I haven't seen it, but if I did—not a fan. Then, after that there is a week of kind of nothing. But then after that we got <u>Wonder Woman 1984</u> and <u>Soul</u> coming out in the same week. So, who knows how we are going to do that?

Diggins, 2:49

We are going to do WonderSoul. We will pretend that the two movies are one movie.

This conversation also pointed towards how *Mostly Nitpicking* goes about selecting the films, which is a routine we will circle back to after introducing the rest of the hosts. DJ seems good natured and is often at the end of jokes with Diggins ribbing back and forth. DJ is a writer for thepopbreak.com and hosts podcasts on that feed such as *Roses & Rejections* about the Bachelor franchise. Diggins is a freelance writer for media and entertainment and has written for thepopbreak.com as well. All three hosts play off each other, frequently swear, and typically end in laughter like a real friend group would.

Nando, December 23, 20:50, [Link](#)

How ready are you for this? What is the IMDB summary for fucking <u>Tenet</u>?

DJ

I yield. I fucking yield. Diggins can have it. I yield going first.

Diggins, 20:56

I can go first.

[All talking over each other]

Ohhh ahhh. Do I go first? I think DJ goes first. Hold on. Yeah, let him go first. Let me hear myself say it.

Nando, 21:08

Yeah, you have to hear me say the answer then you will know what it was. [Laughter]. Alright, Diggins go for it! Have fun.

Later in the Tenet conversation DJ and Diggins banter back and forth, disagreeing per usual, about Nando's question on if Christopher Nolan could make a James Bond movie (Yes, their conversations frequently diverge into parallel topics in a matter of minutes).

> *DJ, 26:12*
> *Well like if he wants to make that kind of like an auteur James Bond with cooler action stuff, then I feel like of course he would want to. Right?*
>
> *Diggins, 26:23*
> *He basically did that. Right now* [with Tenet].
>
> *DJ*
> *NO! He did NOT.*
>
> *Diggins*
> *He did.*
>
> *DJ*
> *No. I refuse to accept that.*
>
> *Diggins*
> *I think this is his version of a James Bond movie. If he made a James Bond movie it would be like this.*

And as turned out to be the pattern, Nando redirects the conversation to "another question I am wondering," and it goes off about why Christopher Nolan and Tom Cruise haven't made a movie together.

The podcast is quirky. The hosts often run bits, such as "Michael Cane" joining the podcast when one of the hosts does an impression of the actor, it often leaves unusual interactions in the episodes, and it swears frequently. One time, Nando with a full mouth, mumbled into the microphone "oh, I had a snack because I figured Diggins and you [DJ] would explain this to each other" (December 23, 2020, 73:33, Link). And in another episode DJ opened a video game to play while they were recording with Diggins calling him out for "yeah, I also just got the Steam notification. Zippybyday [DJ] is now playing Destiny 2" (December 15, 2020, 170:28, Link). Yet *Mostly Nitpicking* found a critical niche where the storytelling style, emphasis on the experience, and off-topic moments resonates. The podcast has 3,300+

followers on Twitter and over 400 episodes produced. The audio critic received a 4.6 Star Rating from over 300 Apple Podcast ratings.

The podcast feed for *Mostly Nitpicking* started out as a very different podcast called *Mad Bracket Status*, or MBS. *Mad Bracket Status* had Nando and DJ as hosts where they put genres of movies head-to-head to rank them, and they would invite Diggins into a few episodes (based on a light dive into the archive). A different research project with a scope large enough to go back 300 episodes would provide insight into the evolution of a podcast since the archive dates to 2014. In May of 2018 the inaugural episode of *Mostly Nitpicking* was released for <u>Avengers: Infinity War</u> with all three hosts. They attempted to describe the new show in the feed.

> *Nando, May 16, 2018, 00:25*
> *I am trying to think of a good way to describe this because we are not a spin off. This isn't like within the Mad Bracket Status cinematic universe of podcasts.*
>
> *DJ, 00: 34*
> *This isn't the Young Sheldon to the Big Bang Theory.*
>
> *Diggins*
> *It is like when modernism became post-modernism. It is like there is a clear difference, but exactly when the split is, it is hard to say.*
>
> *Nando*
> *It is like when the X-Men rebooted themselves but within the same continuity and kind of pretended it wasn't a reboot when it wasn't convenient, but it was when it was.*
>
> *DJ, 00:53*
> *Are we pretending this is or isn't a reboot?*
>
> *Nando*
> *I am not sure. People who listened to the original Mad Bracket Status will know that we are the same people and introduced this show that you are listening to in largely the same way. You might not even be able to tell the difference. But here is the difference. This is a new show. And this is the pilot episode of it.*

They ultimately decided to formalize the conversations about movies into a new podcast, using the existing feed because the "bracket episodes are timeless" and they couldn't find any more brackets to

cover within the framework of that show. Instead, the framework shifted to recapping and nitpicking

movies. Because the creators used the same feed between *Mad Bracket Status* and *Mostly Nitpicking*, the

rating system may be inconsistent. The ratings do not have public dates, which makes is unclear if people

favored the old *MBS* or the new *Mostly Nitpicking* more. The public and dated reviews were

overwhelming positive across both iterations of the program. The scattered negative reviews typically

mentioned a "lack of research" as Jovany5000 left on February 24, 2021.

The lack of research is part of the schtick, and for the listeners who align with the affective niche

the more off-cuff and less prepared style seems to resonate based on the abundance of 5-star reviews and

ratings. The hosts took two opportunities to acknowledge the reviews, and quickly dismissed the

feedback as all part of the joke. The dismissal of the listeners, even in jest, pointed to the divergence from

the traditional populist school of criticism, which considers the audience and almost advertises for the

film (McWhirter, 2016). *Mostly Nitpicking* considers the audience in so far as being part of the joke;

however, the group seems indifferent to change for the audience. It seems to understand that a hyper-

fragmented niche is enough, and that people will enjoy the content or not.

> *Nando, December 15, 2021, 15:45, [Link](#)*
> *I was reading reviews for the podcast because I wanted to see what they are.*
>
> *Diggins*
> *Yeah! Roast us!*
>
> *Nando*
> *And someone was like yeah, they curse a lot. Listen most of the reviews were very nice and positive. And even the one that said we curse a lot was very nice and positive. But it was like, "they curse a lot."*
> *[Talking over each other]*
> *Yeah, we do. It is true. We should stop.*
>
> *Nando*
> *NO! We should keep cursing. Whatever.*

Nando diverges into how Stan Lee says fuck all the time to enhance any sentence. After the Stan Lee

chat, the group gets back to acknowledging the reviews.

Nando, December 15, 2020, 16:46
Ah the negative reviews for us. Uh they talk too long, they kind of ramble.

DJ,
It is too long, and it is not insightful.

Nando,
Yeah, they are unprepared. I don't know. That is the stuff.

Diggins,
It is all true. It is all correct. Nobody should listen to us.

Nando,
But here you are. Give good reviews, or don't. It is fine. But if you are like, they curse a lot, yeah that is part of the thing.

The next time it mentioned the reviews, it was about how Diggins and DJ interact. They do have an adversarial yet friendly dynamic with Diggins usually disagreeing with DJ. Again, they acknowledge but mostly brush off the feedback.

Diggins, December 23, 2020, 85:57, Link
If we are parting the curtain, and I am not being mean to DJ like the commenters on our reviews insist I shouldn't be [DJ laughing].

DJ
The podcast would be less good.

Nando, 86:14
It is one or two reviews, you know. Maybe there is a lot of people who like the meanness, but they just don't speak up because they are so content. I am not saying those opinions are more or less valid. But you know.

The lack of reaction to the comments—or at least treating the comments as a positive extension of roasting behavior, as well the lack of research on the films, relates to the routines for film selection. The primary criteria for selecting films to review is in the "badness," which lends itself towards not researching or taking the conversations as formally, professionally, or seriously as other audio critics in the podcast review space. When explaining the lineup for films, the hosts specifically talk about if a film is nitpickable and worth covering on the show.

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DJ, December 4, 2:54, [Link](#)

Are we going to do <u>Soul</u>? I feel like there is not a lot to nitpick there.

Diggins, 2:58

We aren't going to know if there is a lot to nitpick in either movie until we watch them.

Nando

Yeah, I mean <u>Wonder Woman [1984]</u> is going to be bad. We will definitely be able to find some stuff there, as we know.

Diggins, 3:05

Except for Kristen Wiig is Cheetah, which is going to be the most perfect villain performance of any superhero movie.

Nando

Oh my god. Scary. Jellicle. Boring. Confusing. All at the same time. Every December 25th a cat has to be released into the world. We were lucky last year that it was many. This year it will be just one.

[All laughing]

DJ, 3:20

We should do <u>Cats</u> again just to celebrate a year since <u>Cats</u> came out.

Diggins

Yes. A Catisversy!

Nando, 3:35

Uhhhh Yeah. But I don't know for <u>Soul</u>. It is a movie we don't know very much about it, but it seems like a movie about nothing but bullshit mechanisms for how the babies learn words and stuff. So, I could see it being fun to nitpick. Plus, Jazz isn't music. So, there is that.

All

[laughing] wooowww

The group ended up not picking apart <u>Soul</u> because, in the Year in Review Episode, described it as "<u>Soul</u> was good" (Nando, January 12, 2021, 103:01, [Link](#)). *Mostly Nitpicking* is looking for a particular experience to share with the audiences, grounded in roasting and laughing at the weird or less logical aspects of a film. The experience created also takes the listeners on a journey with the movies.

Mostly Nitpicking published the longest episodes at 204 minutes on average and 1,024 total minutes over five releases. It typically posted on Tuesdays with some variation. The notable production item from *Mostly Nitpicking* was the "5-star runtime" as the community says in that they produce long[gggggggg] episodes. The episodes are so long because it tells the story, in the storyteller style of review, while constantly veering into other paths of conversation. It has a causal and flexible style of review and didn't appear to use outlines. In fact, the lack of preparation and tendency to ramble was noted in the reviews and acknowledged by the hosts directly. Instead, the conversation tends to flow wherever this group of three friends feel like, which reminds me of conversations with my own peers when hanging out. One noticeable pattern, which holds as a field level routine, was providing the first impressions and the synopsis—just like every other critic in this sample. The style for the synopsis was unique in that it plays a IMDb summary guessing game, again turning the practice into an experience for the group and the listeners. The podcast always ended with its "classic segment" where the hosts provide media recommendations to the listeners, which can span 20+ minutes.

Mostly Nitpicking does toe the line into an interpretive niche when it points towards socio-political matters. It is not fully interpretive because it doesn't necessarily explain the context around the movie fully or make it the primary lens. Still, it inserted commentary on social and political matters when the conversation led to that theme. For example, in Wonder Woman 1984's episode, Nando wraps up his thoughts by pointing out the whiteness of the film.

> *December 29, 2020, 206:16, Link*
> *This is like a criticism I had after the fact. Pedro Pascal is, um, his character. I forget where his character is supposed to be from, but he is not white…like white, white, white, white. Everybody else is. Wonder Woman's best friend who is an Amazon is Nubia. I think we need to get some, some friends for Diana who aren't necessarily Steve Trevor and diversify this movie a little bit. It is kind of strange only because I was convinced Nubia would show up and be a part of it.*

While steadily improving, the diversity of narratives and talent on screen continues to be a growth area for American cinema. The history of film heavily privileged and explicitly excluded people of color in mainstream productions while segregating stories and audiences (Bogle, 2010; hooks, 1966; hooks,

1992). Nando alludes the notion of white passing with Pedro Pascal and the flexible boundaries of whiteness in American culture (Jacobson, 1998). While the group jokes around, they do demonstrate awareness of deeper socio-political elements and help point the audience to problematic aspects of films. To Nando's point, Diggins—the friend I imagine as always using sarcasm to point out real issues while not having to explain his view on the issue—adds in form "But what about evil oil-baron Arab Sheik, Nando? That incredibly like racially sensitive character." The other hosts agree "that was awful" and then Diggins adds additional socio-political context: 207:38

> *You mean when they had Gal Gadot save those four kids from being hit by a missile, even*
> *though when Israel launched an attack that killed a bunch of Palestinian kids playing soccer,*
> *she vocally supported it?*

And Nando agreed that it was "so on the nose" and that those scenes didn't really need to be in the movie at all. The group is referencing online criticism of Gal Gadot's previous social media posts in 2014 supporting Israel's Operation Protective Edge that produced many of civilian casualties in the Gaza area. A strike in July 2014 landed on a Gaza Beach and four children playing soccer were killed and several others were wounded (NBC News, 2014; Selby, 2014). As often happens in our internet discursive age, the posts from 2014 resurfaced with new controversy as the release of Wonder Woman 1984 neared (Grisar, 2020). While the group doesn't dive into or unpack what the socio-political contexts mean for their listeners, it is clear the group pays some attention to global issues and will embed snarky acknowledgments into the reviews.

Another example of the socio-political seriousness showed up in The Christmas Chronicles: Part Two[26] as Nando and DJ pondered a trans-activist reading of the text. This movie is loosely about an elf who tries to ruin Christmas to get back at Santa.

> *Nando, December 15, 2020, 154:03, Link*
> *Do you remember what Belsnickle's deal is? This kind of really surprised me. Where he is like,*
> *what his motivation is, I guess.*

---

[26] The Christmas Chronicles: Part Two, 2020. *Kate Pierce, now a cynical teen, is unexpectedly reunited with Santa Claus when a mysterious troublemaker threatens to cancel Christmas - forever.*

DJ

He is upset because Santa cares more about children than he does about him. Right?

Nando, 153:55

Yeah. That for sure. But there is this one bit specifically where there's a line where Belsnickle is like… because we learn that Belsnickle used to be an elf, but he got turned into a human boy. And by being an elf he just looked like a minion and was small. But pretty much the same kid. But then, you know a big kid sized version. But he is like, "I hate being a child. I feel like I am in the wrong body. I don't feel comfortable in my own skin." And I was like, is this movie about trans-people kind of?

DJ

Or body image issues.

Nando,

Yeah! Like what are we doing here movie? We missed this the whole time but you kind of said this, and I was like oh my god! He feels different than the body he is in, kind of. That is interesting. Because that is a thing he says.

DJ, 154:49

Yeah, I mean the movie doesn't have anything to say about that but, you know, you get back into your real body by fucking up Christmas.

It regularly provided statements or satirical takes on salient themes related to socio-political matters if we listen closely. Earlier in the <u>Christmas Chronicles 2</u>, it spent nearly 15 minutes talking about the religious motifs in the film and the representation of Christmas symbols in popular culture. While *Mostly Nitpicking* didn't unpack socio-political themes as the primary lens of the conversation, they are sprinkled around and worth a larger scope and more focused investigation. The conversation often goes from jokes and laughter to recognition of socio-political issues and then back to a joke again on a dime. A future study, looking just for interpretive moments could provide more insight into hyper-accessible iterations of a socio-political discourse in the field.

While *Mostly Nitpicking* mentioned twitter regularly in the podcast, the Twitter activity was extremely low with 9 total tweets from the @nitpickingpod handle. The personal hosts were more active, and in a study with expanded scope into the hosts behind the audio critic podcast would produce more insight than collected here.

Row Labels	Count of Function of Tweet	Average of Likes	Sum of Likes2	Average of Replies	Sum of Replies2	Average of Retweets	Sum of Retweets2
⊟nitpickingpod	9	54	482	3	100.00%	4	100.00%
⊞Audience Interaction	3	10	31	1	11.11%	0	0.00%
⊞Publicity	4	14	57	5	66.67%	1	11.76%
⊞Recommendation	1	394	394	6	22.22%	23	67.65%
⊞Show Topics	1	0	0	0	0.00%	7	20.59%
Grand Total	9	54	482	3	100.00%	4	100.00%

Mostly Nitpicking barely used the Twitter account. The tweets were split between publicity to promote the new episodes and thanking community members who posted the Spotify Yearly Wrap numbers. The most liked tweet was a gif of Cats responding to one of the Spotify posts: Cats seems to be a community favorite and inside joke as tweets from January 2020 about the Cats episodes received more engagement, between 37-50 *likes,* than tweets observed in this sample (December 2020). Cats, as a notoriously bad film, speaks to the ethos of this community rooted in roasting behavior and affection for the bad. *Mostly Nitpicking* often described selecting films based on the badness as a routine.
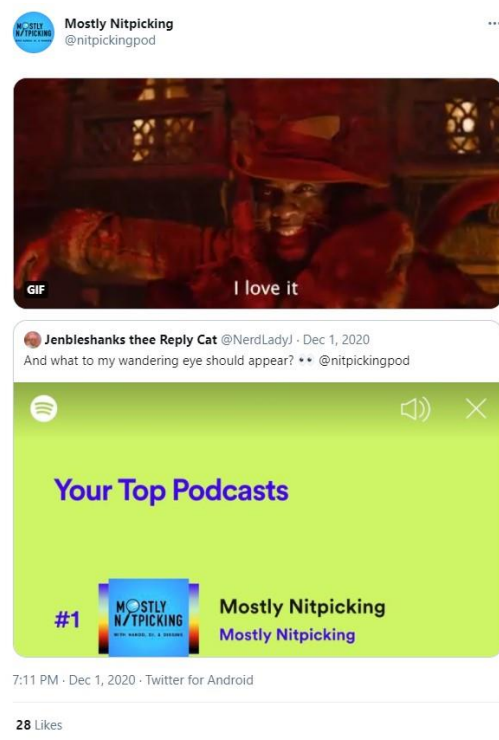
Figure 16: Mostly Nitpicking tweeted infrequently with few words.

The hosts did acknowledge Twitter within the show at times. During the Christmas Chronicles 2 episode, they continued a debate about if movie theater experiences are good or bad that had spilled over

onto Twitter. A running bit has been that Nando, and DJ always have bad experiences at the movie theater where Diggins always has great showings.

> *DJ*
> *We were proven right, Nando!*
>
> *Diggins, 17:39*
> *What? In what world?*
>
> *DJ*
> *The Twitter discourse, Diggins.*
>
> *Diggins*
> *The "Twitter Discourse" was like two people were like "I also have bad experiences." Everyone else was like you both are crazy.*
>
> *Nando, 17:56*
> *No, no. I got so many. So many people were like I saw this and "some guy brought in a crab leg. It was the worst smell of all time. It was very loud." And like that is what I am reading right now. Alex from High Top Films, another YouTuber, said exactly the same thing that I said. He lives in Pittsburg. Not that that is a surprise…pretty sure that is a known thing. But maybe Pennsylvania is the problem.*

Nando went on to read other tweets he had received on the topic. Locating the tweets, they mentioned was challenging because the community often interacted directly with the hosts, who were individually more active than the primary account. That activity of individual action over the organization's account (the audio critic official Twitter) appeared across the sample. For example, Nando would respond to tweets sent to @nitpickingpod with his personal @NandoVMovies account. Similarly, Diggins responded using his personal @thisisanoddname account.
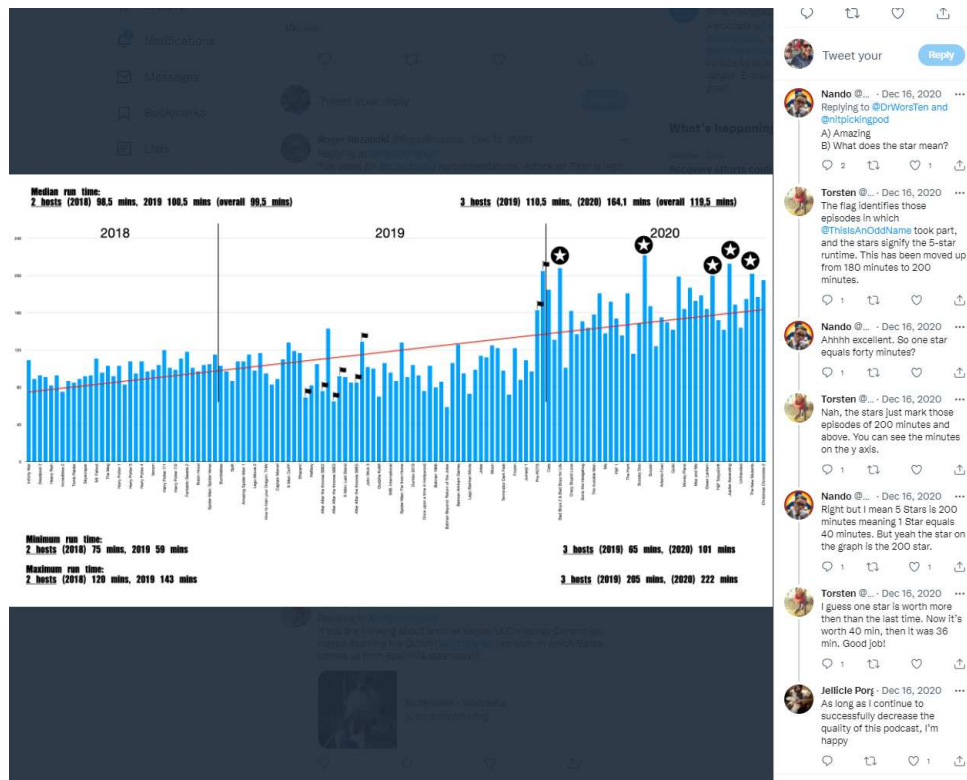
Figure 17: The Mostly Nitpicking community creates graphs of the runtime and running jokes.

The example tweet shows both how the niche audience appreciates the 5-Star Runtime as a running joke, even investing time in graphing out the progression of the podcast. Torsten (@drworsten)'s graph shows us how the episodes have consistently gotten longer over the years. And even though some of the reviews were negative on the runtime, the community has also grown over the years. At the beginning of this study process, September 2020, it had 3,000 Twitter followers and ended the study with 3,400, showing growth.

Despite the long run times and active and growing community, *Mostly Nitpicking* did not integrate a marketing mix into the episodes. Nando's YouTube channel has a Patreon that allows individuals to contribute a monthly sum directly to the creators, with a small portion being taken by the Patreon platform. In exchange for the monthly sum, users receive exclusive content depending on their payment tier. The Nando V Movies has 500+ Patrons, which may help with any production costs of the *Mostly Nitpicking* podcast but is not clearly or discreetly aligned.

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Mostly Nitpicking did appear on YouTube, though with less emphasis on the audience or use of the infrastructure than *Show Me the Meaning*. The YouTube for *Mostly Nitpicking* uploads the audio of the podcasts with a static blue logo on the same days it is released to Spotify. YouTube appears to be an extension of podcast routines rather than integrating video or live chat options into the production. It has 500 subscribers on YouTube with several hundred views per upload.

The hosts for *Mostly Nitpicking* presented some of the most personality of the cases because the routines were not influenced by a larger, professional organization. This audio critic is crowd-backed completely and presents a simple conversation among friends that the audience is invited to listen in on. They swore, bantered, and produced frequent jokes, which many of the jokes being running bits that reward audience members who return over and over. The niche that it cultivates is affective, centering the experience of seeing a film above context, artistic value, thematic readings, or even technical aspects of production. Of course, it dabbled in those topics as inherent to a film review; however, the primary purpose of every conversation and episode hinged on roasting the logic and sharing off-the-cuff thoughts loosely related to the text at hand. The storyteller style of review produced very long episodes as it walked the audience through the movie with diverging, even rambling, discourse. *Mostly Nitpicking* continues to grow the market fragment, and all the hosts participate in the ecosystem of media through their alternate jobs or hobbies. This type of audio critic, the ones who relish in roasting a film—with affection—and providing a recapping of the experience is distinct from traditional forms of film criticism drawing many future research opportunities across audio-visual mediums.

3.6 The influence of organization and economics on audio critic routines

This chapter offered examples of the voice, niche, community, tools, and economic structures for the audio critics in the study. I provided case-level analyses to build a foundation for the next two chapters that explore the field-level data and theory. Within the case-level analyses, I described the personalities within the audio critic podcasts, the production routines for each podcast, the Twitter and social media usage, and the economic influences through advertising and profit-earning avenues used by each critic. We followed along with the critic niches that each podcast facilitated:

- the interpretive niches of *Show Me the Meaning* and *Black Girl Film Club* that related the thematic aspects of the film to lived contexts

- the technical niche of *The Big Picture* emphasizing agents in film production and focusing on the business of the industry

- the artistic evaluations from *Pop Culture Happy Hour* within the canonical niche that stayed close to traditions of film review and recommendation

- the affective niche of *Mostly Nitpicking* that takes the listener on a journey through the thoughts, questions, and experiences related to the film viewing

This section directly compares the treatment of a single film by four different cases to further demonstrate how the organizations and the communities manifest influences in the discourse. The comparison of the Wonder Woman 1984 coverage illuminates the clear distinctions between each audio critic and point towards the overall influence of organizational differences, technocultures, and economic structure on the discourse of film criticism. The levels of influence through the media sociology framework reflect individual choices, routine practices that a field shares, media organizational influences, and then institution and system-level influencers (Shoemaker & Reese, 2014).

The differences in activity and production can be explained when looking across several layers of influence to unpack how or why each audio critic produced the content sampled. Each individual host brings their own priorities and style to the review, which the routine of sharing first impressions allows to manifest. The tone for each review is set by the first impressions and the routine of providing a synopsis of the film, which critics use to frame the conversations and create boundaries for the critical niche. For example, *Show Me the Meaning* provides complete synopsis because the interpretive niche seeks to closely examine aspects of the film to relate its meaning to culture—spoilers are not a concern, and the crowd-backed organization can assume the audience sought out the content with awareness of the goal. On the other hand, *Pop Culture Happy Hour* vocalizes awareness of spoilers and takes care to avoid providing too much narrative information on films as they evaluate the artistic qualities to help the

canonical niche decide if they want to engage with the film. *Pop Culture Happy Hour* is influenced by the National Public Radio network, meaning the content could be shared more widely by audiences who may not have chosen *Pop Culture Happy Hour* if it were being replayed on the radio, for example. This chapter compares the Wonder Woman 1984 episodes to identify how organizations, from legacy-backed and crowd-backed, and the social systems of film criticism through technocultures and economics manifest as influences among the different critics.

Firstly, each audio critic covered very different sets of films, with overlapping texts being few and far between. The very selection of films speaks to the organizational differences as the legacy-backed critics, *The Big Picture,* and *Pop Culture Happy Hour*, covered highbrow cinema and new releases such as Mank[27], Ma Rainey's Black Bottom[28], and The Midnight Sky[29]—which were not critiqued by the other three audio critics. The Wisecrack organization that produces *Show Me the Meaning* covered more popular culture classic hits that hold some thematic resonance with society such as Ferris Bueller's Day Off or Bad Santa. And the small crowd-backed organizations covered films that aligned with their niches most: *Black Girl Film Club* covered much older movies that did not overlap with anyone else such as Natural Born Killers and Batman Returns while *Mostly Nitpicking* covered films that were known for their entertainment value or their "badness" such as Jiu Jitsu[30] and The Christmas Chronicles 2. A further study with large-scope methods can explore the influence of the organization on film selection across a big sample of crowd-backed and legacy-backed audio critics for deeper insights. However, in this rich case study, the single point of overlap among four of the five audio critics, Wonder Woman 1984 can be unpacked for the technocultures, organizational, and economic influences on how the film is covered.

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[27] Mank, 2020. *1930's Hollywood is reevaluated through the eyes of scathing social critic and alcoholic screenwriter Herman J. Mankiewicz as he races to finish the screenplay of Citizen Kane (1941).*

[28] Ma Rainey's Black Bottom, 2020. *Tensions rise when trailblazing blues singer Ma Rainey and her band gather at a recording studio in Chicago in 1927.*

[29] The Midnight Sky, 2020. *This post-apocalyptic tale follows Augustine, a lonely scientist in the Arctic, as he races to stop Sully and her fellow astronauts from returning home to a mysterious global catastrophe.*

[30] Jiu Jitsu, 2020. *Every six years, an ancient order of jiu-jitsu fighters joins forces to battle a vicious race of alien invaders. But when a celebrated war hero goes down in defeat, the fate of the planet and mankind hangs in the balance.*

Wonder Woman 1984, released on December 25, 2020, was the first in-home release through the Warner Brother and HBOMax deal. This film is part of the DC Extended Universe about superheroes among us. The DCEU is often compared to the MCU, the Marvel Cinematic Universe, with typically lesser ratings and reviews. Four critics covered the film: *Pop Culture Happy Hour, The Big Picture, Mostly Nitpicking,* and *Show Me the Meaning*. *Black Girl Film Club* did not discuss this new release film. In fact, *Black Girl Film Club* skipped the entire cycle of this new release by publishing an episode on Batman Returns (1992) on December 18 and the Her Smell[31] on January 15. *Show Me the Meaning* (wisecrack) also waited until far after the other critics to review Wonder Woman 1984 as it was also on a hiatus from December 18. Already, the crowd-backed critics displayed more flexibility in producing new episodes than the legacy-backed and journalist-centric critics of *Pop Culture Happy Hour* and *The Big Pictur*e, who produced episodes throughout all of December including December 25 and December 31 (typical holiday observances).

Table 7: List of Wonder Woman 1984 Reviews

CaseID	TextID	Release Date	Day of Week	Text Leng	Text Title
pchh	PCHH09	Wednesday, December 23, 2020	Wednesday	23	Wonder Woman 1984 and What's Making Us Happy
thebigpic	TBP05	Friday, December 25, 2020	Friday	83	Wonder Woman 1984 is here, on HBO Max. Plus: Paul Greengrass
nitpickingpod	MNP04	Tuesday, December 29, 2020	Tuesday	226	Wonder Woman 1984
wisecrack	SMTM04	Friday, January 15, 2021	Friday	61	Wonder Woman 1984 (Directed by Patty Jenkins): Wonder or Blunder?

The Big Picture discussed Wonder Woman 1984 twice: the second episode released on December 31, 2020, was a discussion of the online response to the film and the previous episode. The second discussion revealed the aspects of relationships and engagement between the audio critic and the interpretive community, with the audience visibly expressing discontent with the treatment of the film, which will be explored in 3.6.2 on interpretive communities.

The audio critics follow organizational routines for their production practices, which the Wonder Woman 1984 episode aligned with. *Pop Culture Happy Hour* routinely posted content Sunday through Thursday with run times between 16 and 30 minutes. Its Wonder Woman 1984 episode fell exactly into

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[31] Her Smell, 2018. *A self-destructive punk rocker struggles with sobriety while trying to recapture the creative inspiration that led her band to success.*

those expectations and demonstrates the influence of a legacy-backed organization rooted in consistency and deadlines of journalism. The National Public Radio network often uses the podcasts in its broadcast radio programming, so consistent and uniform production allows for the cross-posting across mediums. The similar legacy-backed organization for *The Big Picture* also aligned with the routines of 70–90-minute episodes released over working days. *Show Me the Meaning* stuck to its organizational release schedule of Fridays with episodes around 60 minutes, and while *Show Me the Meaning* is crowd-backed, they draw heavily on consistency given the large schedule of shows for YouTube and podcasts produced across the Wisecrack organization. The *Mostly Nitpicking* crew are not part of a larger organization, and its single release each week can come out on Tuesday, Wednesday, or Friday. The Wonder Woman 1984 episode was released on a Tuesday. The run-times represent a larger range than the rest of the group, with Wonder Woman 1984 contributing to that range with the 3.5-hour run-time (author note: it was a JOURNEY to get through and code and was completed in a single session for the first experience). One reason the run-time was so long was because it also reviewed the entire season of the Mandalorian television show in the first hour, demonstrating some of the flexibility *Mostly Nitpicking* has since it is not connected to a larger organization or staff. It seems to have the ability to diverge in the topics whereas the other critics who receive funding and resources from a larger network stayed much closer to the titled prompt.
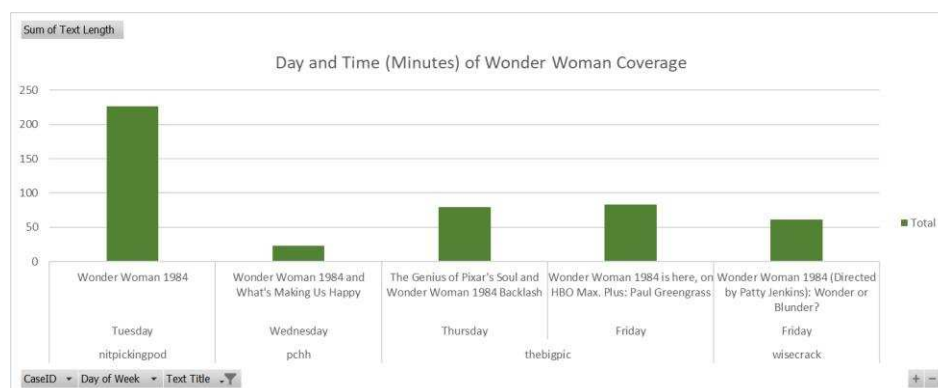
Figure 18: Production Data for Wonder Woman 1984 Coverage

Most of the audio critics stayed within 90 minutes for the episode, while *Mostly Nitpicking* far overshadowed that routine. *The Big Picture* spent closer to 50 minutes (about half) of the episode discussing <u>Wonder Woman 1984</u> because it covered two distinct topics and segments with <u>Soul</u> and an interview with Paul Greengrass. The titles of the episodes reflected the two distinct segments of conversation, unlike *Mostly Nitpicking*, which sets consumer expectations in line with the professional situation of *The Big Picture*. *Pop Culture Happy Hour* also devoted several minutes of the short runtime to the What's Making Us Happy (recommendations) segment of the show. The remainder of this section will explore more deeply what elements and systems influenced the differences in coverage.

3.6.1 Organizational and Niche Influences

The first point of comparison is the organizational influences and the interpretive community niche that the critics produce content for. While each critic fell into moments of roasting or interrogating the logic of the film, which will be discussed in Chapter 4 further, the overall conversations demonstrated a different listening experience couched within the expectations of the organization and niche created. *Mostly Nitpicking* is flexible with no organizational oversight and provided a storyteller experience with sarcastic commentary on the film speaking to an affective niche. *The Big Picture* draws on institutional authority under The Ringer Network for entertainment news and analysis, and the community pushed back on the hosts when the episode diverged into less technical discourses. This subsection unpacks how the first impressions and synopsis, which are field-level routines, point towards the organization and the niche's influence on content. Then the interpretive communities around each critic are explored for further insight into those organizational and niche influences.

Each critic held the field routine of providing first impressions and a synopsis for the audience. To explicate the difference in the niches and organizational influences, the impressions and synopsis of each episode will be described and unpacked. These segments occur in the first one-third of the typical episode and provide strong foundations and clear roadmaps for the nature of the conversation. The potential strength of the impressions and synopsis presents an area of continued research on larger scales

to test how well researchers and audiences can determine the niche of a critic within the first portion of an episode or text.

Show Me the Meaning began with Austin Hayden introducing the film with some cast and production context including how the film has "gotten a lot of shit online" which informs the conversation as it covered the film several weeks after the release and the other critics. Within three minutes it was into the first impressions. It begins with guest host Amanda Sherker's thoughts where she specifically mentions their overseeing organization, Wisecrack, and how that organizational tie influenced the production. She watched the movie because of her role in the organization:

> *Amanda, January 15, 2021, 2:48, Link*
>
> *Okay, so I actually watched it twice: not out of desire but because I was writing our Wisecrack video about it, which I think comes out next Friday. Check it out.*

Austin prompts Amanda to expand on why she felt so bummed about it, to which Amanda explains the pressure that female or woman-led films carry.

> *More so because I feel like a bad woman superhero film can become like a warrant to not make more superhero films. It is so tenuous when you just are starting to see female superhero films and you want them to be as good as the first* Wonder Woman.

Austin builds on Amanda's thought by agreeing and pointing out that "it is a little bullshit too that the female superhero films have so much pressure to hit it out of the park when there are clearly plenty of mediocre dude-led superhero films." Already in the opening impressions, *Show Me the Meaning* is speaking into the interpretive niche that unpacks and connects aspects of the film to social and political contexts. Then Raymond Creamer hops into the conversation with further insight, showing the academic and sophisticated lens that *Show Me the Meaning* approaches the conversations through to provide those interpretive discourses the Wisecrack channel and community niche contribute.

> *Raymond, 4:19*
>
> *And just that female led, and female directed films in general typically, I mean, women get far fewer chances at the bat than men do behind the camera. A guy's movie comes out and flops, well that is just a flop. But like Amanda was alluding to, when a female movie comes out and flops then everyone in the industry goes oh people don't like movies with ladies or directed by ladies. And it does feel very unfair that this franchise has to carry the entire burden of expectations for female superheroes in general.*

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Austin, the consistent facilitator of *Show Me the Meaning* to keep the conversation on pace for the 60-minute runtime, asks the group to pin or remember their remaining thoughts on this topic. He moves the group forward by finishing the first impressions segment and then provides the recap. The remaining impressions compared it to the first Wonder Woman, Birds of Prey, and Shazam (all prior DCEU movies) how the movie was "really heavy handed with the themes and overly sentimental" (Austin, 8:20). As the group stated their impressions on the narrative and technical film aspects, topics inherent to a film review, the consideration of theme and culture remained present throughout.

In contrast, *Pop Culture Happy Hour* focused the first impressions of the film on characters and narrative far more than the cultural implications. The group for this episode was Linda Holmes, Stephen Thompson, Glen Weldon, and guest Ayesha Rascoe (@ayesharascoe). Glen began the impressions by focusing on characters design, some production choices, and ultimately his big take-away: "But look all you got to know is I grew up with Linda Carter Wonder Woman and Superfriends. And something happened at the one hour and ten-minute mark that made me stand up and cheer" (4:51). Ayesha was next to share her first impressions She spoke about Gal Gadot's embodiment of Wonder Woman and focused on the theme that resonates from the film.

> *December 23, 2020, 6:10, Link*
> *You got to see some weakness. And to me that made it a little bit more relatable. And just the idea of you know dealing with what people desire and how what you desire can also be your weakness, right. I felt like there was a deeply human thing in this. And no, it wasn't a lot of, there was action, but it wasn't a lot of action, but I liked the human story that was told. And it was just fun. I really liked the dynamic between Diana and Steve. I love that. I felt like that is when it really took on life for me, was that dynamic between them.*

Stephen built on the points from Glen about cheering for certain points and how "man this is really really missing out on audiences. This is a movie that you would ordinarily see surrounded by a bunch of like-minded dorks in a theater who are like murmuring and cheering every time there is some piece of canon that is referenced for addressed" (7:10). Stephen focused on the energy from fans that elevate the superhero genre and the pay-offs. He also built on Ayesha's comment about lightness and how those story beats worked well for him as well. He considered it an "absolutely inscrutable hash of paradoxes and BS"

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after the film lost the lightness and storylines. The paradoxes he references connected to the character motivations and plotting from a storytelling frame. And Linda finished the impressions by building on what the previous hosts had described by agreeing that the motivations for the characters were issues, particularly for the villain, Max Lord. The first impressions of *Pop Culture Happy Hour* stayed overwhelmingly focused within the movie itself while avoiding specifics about the plot details to keep the conversation spoiler-free for the canonical niche and Public Radio organization.

  The Big Picture opens most of its episodes with a cold-open, like the routine of *Pop Culture Happy Hour*, that feels like a hold-over routine from broadcast media. Many radio and television shows open with content to keep the potential audience from changing the station before playing an ad break or the credits. *The Big Picture* cold-open provides an overview of the episode before running into an ad break. On the other side of the ad, Sean Fennessey and Amanda Dobbins provided their initial takes, grounded in more industry contexts that facilitate the technical niche and entertainment analysis organization. Amanda begins with how the superhero genre operates with third act issues (typically a large final battle with superhero mechanics) and Sean expands on the actor's performances and place within the industry.

> *Amanda, December 25, 2021, 2:41, [Link](#)*
> *Had a delightful time in the first hour. Would have been very happy if it had ended at two hours. We have got to talk about the last 30 minutes of this movie, of all Wonder Woman movies, and as you noted in the outline of all superhero movies. But, you know, it's I don't care because that is true of every single movie. So, in terms of what it achieves outside of the kind of bonkers, DC Universe superhero nonsense, I had a lovely time.*

Sean builds on Amanda's first impression, 3:09

> *Yeah, the first film was incredibly important because it put a female superhero at the center of the brand and was hugely successful. And that was a major part of talking about why the movie was meaningful. And there was a lot to recommend about the first movie. There was this incredible chemistry between Gal Gadot and Chris Pine. I think she emerged as a fascinating action star in the likes that we have not seen in a long time. I have been thinking about her in relationship to Arnold Schwarzenegger lately and the way that they have a very similar on-screen presence, where it is like it doesn't really matter if they are a good actor, they are just good at being in a movie. And I feel it is also true in this film. I think you can make the argument that she is not in enough of this movie, despite it being named* <u>Wonder Woman 1984</u>*.*

The conversation goes on to unpack the cultural moment and nostalgia tied to the 1980s, primarily how "it is perfectly fine for the setting of the film" and how the costumes, music choices, and food court provided some nostalgia for the decade. Amanda noted how the "lightness and the silliness of the 80s fits really well with the kind of Wonder Woman world that Patty Jenkins creates. When it tries to get into the geo-political aspects of the 80s, ehhh we can talk more about that" (6:12). Sean further builds on the idea of geo-politics by describing Pedro Pascal's character: 7:16

> *And we come to 1984 and we are introduced to a couple of characters very quickly, the first of which is Pedro Pascal's Max Lord who is a, uh, seems like a combination of a TV evangelist/oil tycoon/self-made entrepreneur type who has a series of television commercials and has a big swoop of blond hair. And he is wearing these gawdy pinstripe suits. And there is an obvious allusion to the hucksterism of Donald Trump, circa the <u>Art of the Deal</u>, 1980.*

Sean then introduces and describes the Kristen Wiig character to set up the core of the conversation about the actor's performances, which aligns with the typical routine of centering the agents in cultural productions (directors, actors, crew, distribution channels) in the reviews.

> *And it is complicated because I love Kristen Wiig and I love Pedro Pascal. And I think when they get to be doing Pedro Pascal and Kristen Wiig things, which is basically that first hour of the movie. The movie is really singing. Kristen Wiig is doing this weird hair-brained screwball comedy thing, which is like a shrinking violet trying to access her confidence and is constantly in comparison to Diana, but also, they form a bond.*

The Big Picture alluded to the same cultural meaning for a female superhero as *Show Me the Meaning,* but the different organizations and niches led the conversations in divergent directions. *The Big Picture* directed the conversation more towards actors and aspects of the film itself while *Show Me the Meaning* stuck closer to the philosophical implications of female led films.

And lastly, *Mostly Nitpicking* began the episode with chatter to catch up on the hosts' holidays because Nando, DJ, and Diggins are friends first and hosts second. The routines produce a podcast that captures friendly conversation for the audience to be a fly on the wall for: something that does distinguish it from legacy critics that followed more structured and audience focused routines. *The Big Picture* hosts mentioned an "outline" they prepare and follow and *Show Me the Meaning* keeps on a consistent time schedule. After catching up, *Mostly Nitpicking* then talked about <u>The Mandalorian</u> for 40 minutes before

introducing the title card of the episode, <u>Wonder Woman 1984</u>. It did not share the first impressions and

experiences with the film until 62 minutes into the 225-minute episode, signaling how the affective niche

and no organizational influence can value casual experiences over tightly structured content. The group's

first impressions focus more on their feelings during the film rather than any technical or cultural aspects.

> *DJ, December 29, 2021; 62:08, [Link](#)*
>
> *I thought it was long. I thought it was unnecessarily long. When I saw the 2 and ½ hour*
> *runtime, when you started, I was like Oh man there is going to be a lot of movies in here. And*
> *what it really felt like was that there was very little left on the cutting room floor, was my read*
> *of this movie. I kept saying this while I was watching this to Michelle [his wife], there is a*
> *good movie inside of here somewhere. It is just not the movie we got.*

DJ went on to give some praise to the "good bits" and "good themes" but that the "over the top comic

book villain" was not something he really wanted to see. Diggins added on to DJ's first impression that

"none of it gets the room it needs to breath. All of it just hints at the interesting stuff" and that "it just

ends up being not that fun or interesting. But man, I could just feel the good movie that exists in this

movie, and I wish it was here instead of this movie" (63:36). Nando agreed with both his co-hosts and

added more on his feelings.

> *62:42*
>
> *I remembered finishing the movie and not just being like oh that was not very good, but also*
> *having almost like an icky feeling, kind of. Like egghhh what was that? And it was kind of a*
> *mean-spirited movie, in some ways.*

The emphasis on feelings about the film set up the *Mostly Nitpicking* conversation that will focus more on

roasting the questionable motivations of the characters, the use of props, and the plot mechanics that

contributed to the mean spirited and feeling of ick alluded towards.

Within the first few minutes of conversation, four distinct discourses were set up by the audio

critics. The field level routine of providing a first impressions does point consumers, and discourse

scholars, in the direction of what critical niche the podcast belongs within and how the organization might

influence the types of content. The second routine of providing a synopsis of the film helps us further

unpack what to expect from the discourse and shows how each organization and niche confronts the same

movie differently.

Show Me the Meaning provides a full beat synopsis of the films because it follows a routine of explaining and analyzing deeper themes that require knowledge of the full plot. Austin read the synopsis, which is the usual routine for his position as the primary host and facilitator of the conversation. I could not find the written synopsis online nor do the hosts cite a specific source they are reading from: it appears they write their own synopsis for the purpose of the show. The recap is detailed and retells the entire story; however, it functions well as table setting for the thematic analysis that *Show Me the Meaning* goes onto provide. Austin explicitly indicates moments for analysis, such as the "huge theme alert" around taking shortcuts, which the hosts go on to connect to our capitalist ethos in society. Austin describes Steve's status throughout the recap with more detail, and they later spend time analyzing romantic cliches and the issue with body swapping as a plot mechanic. The aspects that the conversation later focuses on are bolded in the recap below to help visualize how *Show Me the Meaning* builds a foundation for the review to prime the audience for the discourses.

> *Austin, January 22, 2021, 9:14: Link*
>
> *The story begins with a young Diana Prince competing in a race against older Amazons. Diana falls from her horse and with guts and determination, she takes a shortcut to catch up with the others. However, because she attempted to cheat, she is removed from the competition and given a lecture about how cheating is bad, and truth is all that matters. **Huge theme alert here**. We jump to 1984 where Diana is doing the classic dual identity superhero thing, working in the Smithsonian in DC while also doing her Wonder Woman thing to save people….*

Show Me the Meaning provides the longest one-take recap and blurs the line between providing context and retelling the entire story. The episode style is not storyteller, as with *Mostly Nitpicking*, because *Show Me the Meaning* doesn't dig into each beat with a grounding in the experience or drawing out what we are seeing, hearing, or thinking in each moment. Rather it focuses on providing the context for a few specific themes that require knowing all parts of the story.

Pop Culture Happy Hour received a screener and published this episode on December 23, two days before the film was released on HBO Max. The early screener and pre-release discussion was grounded the most in legacy routines for criticism where the critic held more authority, responsibility, and positioning to recommend films to audience who had not seen it rather than the typical routines of audio

critics who expand on films with an assumption the audience has seen the movie (Frey & Sayad, 2015).

PCHH provided a thoughtful discussion focused more on the narrative qualities and value without

"ruining" the movie for someone who had not experienced it yet. It does call for the audience to share

how they feel after seeing it, an audience interaction and use of technology that will be unpacked later in

this section.

  Pop Culture Happy Hour was careful not to spoil the movie by providing vague plot markers and

a most standard summary of the narrative but not the plotting. The synopsis style held to the typical

routine of providing enough foundation for a viewer to follow along with the conversation but not so

much that movie is spoiled. This style signals the imagined audience to be a mix of those who have and

have not seen the film but use *Pop Culture Happy Hour* for a recommendation. Linda provides the

synopsis to set up the audience for the conversation three minutes in and after two ad breaks ([link](#)).

> *To set up the plot as best I understood it. Wonder Woman 1984 revolves around a magic rock*
> *that grants wishes. Pedro Pascal plays Maxwell Lord, a huckster who of course wants ultimate*
> *power of the universe. Kristen Wiig plays a nerdy anthropologist who will later transform*
> *sorta of <u>She's All That</u> style into the frightening nemesis, Cheetah. And if you are wondering*
> *how Chris Pine is in this movie considering how Wonder Woman ended, just do not worry*
> *about it. Because it will all become somewhat clear.*

  The Big Picture did not provide a synopsis for the film. Instead, it opted to explicitly warn the

audience that it is "spoiling this movie" and directed listeners to watch it before engaging in the

conversation. The spoiler warning came from Amanda after the first impressions, about nine minutes in.

The episode came out on the same day that <u>Wonder Woman 1984</u> was released as the hosts received

screeners. The closest thing to a synopsis was in the cold-open where it shared some context; however, it

mostly overviewed the entire episode with only a little situating of the movie itself ([link](#)).

> *I'm Sean Fennessey. I'm Amanda Dobbins. And this is the Big Picture, a conversation show*
> *about Wonder Woman 1984: at home! The latest installment in the DCEU has arrived on HBO*
> *Max after a controversial decision earlier this year by Warner Media. So that means, me and*
> *Amanda and all of you at home are watching this movie on Christmas Day. Later in this*
> *episode, I will be joined by a truly great filmmaker, Paul Greengrass*

The emphasis on Warner Media and the DCEU highlights the niche that *The Big Picture* caters to

technical, industry focused conversations. It did deliver on those topics by contextualizing the film within

genre, digging into the time and medium of the release and distribution, discussing the actor performances, and predicting the future of the franchise.

Mostly Nitpicking always plays a game as the mechanism to introduce the synopsis to the audience—extending the routine of experience and affect over direct information transfer. The game entails Nando providing hints for Diggins and DJ to guess the IMDb summary. Whoever is closest, as judged by Nando, wins—bragging rights.[32] The game allowed me to feel more friendship and parasocial relationship building as we, the audience, listen into friendly jabs and personality. DJ often loses this game, and he brings up his past loses with the other two laughing in the background at 55:39: "I am still salty from you selecting Diggins as the winner for the Tenet: wait am I salty from Tenet or a different one? Oh no, I am salty from Christmas Chronicles 2 because of troubled teenager."
Nando allows DJ to go first with his guess.

> *Wonder Woman, continuing to deal with the loss of her long past boyfriend Steve Trevor must encounter a new foe when a strange man appears who says he can grant any wish you want, beginning with Steve Trevor being brought back to life.*

Diggins follows right behind DJ with his guess.

> *The sequel to the hit movie from DC Comics and Warner Brothers, Wonder Woman 1984 sees Gal Gadot return as Wonder Woman facing off against new foes like Kristen Wiig as Cheetah and Pedro Pascal as Maxwell Lorde in a fight to do good stuff [chorus of laughter]*

Nando read the IMDb summary and declares Diggins the winner for another film (57:15)

> *Rewind to the 1980s as Wonder Woman's next big screen adventure finds her facing two all new foes: Max Lorde and The Cheetah. So, Diggins, you were so good. That bit with the two new foes *chefs kiss**

The style of synopsis allows the audience to engage with the friendly banter as each host established, and what I ultimately recognized, as their trope and purpose in the friend group. Nando is the moderator and conductor to keep the train of thought moving forward, DJ is the good-natured jester who sustains multi-

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[32] The IMDb Summary game evolved over the spring and summer 2021. The hosts now rotate who judges the summary guesses with the winner becoming the judge for the next episode. They asked for audience participation on the name with "The IMDbee with two es like Spelling Bee" being chosen. Link

episode bits, and Diggins is the more serious friend who you bring to trivia because he knows and notices a lot of facts. DJ complained that he didn't understand Nando's hints and that "Diggins had an unfair advantage" to which Diggins quipped back "…SOOO…. Diggins had an advantage by being smarter" (58:02). The group laughed and they agree to grade DJ on a curve from now on. The roasting of each other sets the tone for the way they talk about films, and this film especially. Roasting comes from a place of affection rather than malice, as demonstrated by the ways they roast each other. The three go on to interrogate everything from the character motivations to the aging mechanics to the plot devices, and inconsistencies with the plot. And like the roasting of a friend, the discussion feels grounded in genuine appreciation for a film experience and fun to be found.

Again, the routine of providing a synopsis or recap for the movie points listeners towards the frame of the conversation. The more traditional critics backed by journalist-adjacent legacy organizations provided straight-forward overviews with just enough information to orient the audience and without spoilers. When *The Big Picture* moved into being a spoiler conversation, it announced it as such for the listeners. The crowd-backed organizations provided either more in-depth recaps or made the process into a game, both serving to draw the audience into the conversation more fully. The niche of the critic manifests in the synopsis style with the critics emphasizing what qualities or aspects of the film they go on to speak about. The last aspect to compare within the organizational and niche influences on the critics is the flow of the conversation and interpretive communities within each discourse.

Each of the audio critics provided commentary and reviews about the movie, which maps out the type of niche facilitated. For each critic, the conversation map and visualization will be provided and unpacked. Even more telling in this study, was the visible feedback from the communities. After the Wonder Woman 1984 episodes, the interpretive communities for the critics provided visible feedback to their hosts. If the critics aligned with the expectations of the niche and followed their organization's routines, such as *Pop Culture Happy Hour* and *Mostly Nitpicking*, the feedback was neutral to positive. If the critics did not align with the established traits set by the organization and defined through the niche, the community provided negative feedback as *The Big Picture* demonstrated. Of course, I am keeping in

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mind that often it is a vocal minority on either end of the spectrum leaving comments and reviews. Still, the needs, expectations, and perspectives of the vocal audience members reflect the critical niches and reinforces the imagined community loop between creator and listener (Spinelli & Dann, 2019). Future research through interview, survey, or sentiment analysis of larger samples for community artifacts might produce robust understanding of interpretive communities within each niche of critical discourse.

  Pop Culture Happy Hour discussed <u>Wonder Woman 1984</u> through the expected lens of canonical criticism, and as Ayesha Rascoe acknowledged, "obviously with any superhero movie, you have to set aside certain things" (December 23, 2020, 5:27). The entire review set a tone of respect for the genre, even when it indulged in a bit of logic interrogation (expanded on in Chapter 4), and maintained a review style of artistic analysis, character analysis, and discussion of the plotting, choreography, CGI, and other narrative qualities. The conversation was brief with two primary topics covered. *Pop Culture Happy Hour* stuck to the traditional selling points that critics might enact when the readers are undecided about seeing a film. It focuses on the big names and encourages the audience to feel confident and "not worry" about plot details that can hang up viewers, particularly for superhero genre films. The critic provided a character analysis and then an interrogation of the plot logic without spending too much time on either. The episode was not about deeply exploring a theme or describing a full scene to the audience; rather the hosts spent only a few minutes on each general topic to leave the audience with more sense of expectation for experiencing the film themselves.

  The role of *Pop Culture Happy Hour* within the National Public Radio network, operating within news and journalism systems, more closely resembles traditional, canonical film criticism that offers context and a recommendation about the film to help listeners decide if they want to view the movie or not. It did so while drawing comparisons and allusions between other similar films. Glen Weldon established that tone as he shared his initial impressions to lead the conversation with emphasis on the character and the artistic influences.

Glen, December 23, 2020, 3:38
What I like about this film is that the tone in the first half seems like a direct homage to the 1978 Richard Donner Superman as some people have pointed out. And I am all for that. But this had its own story to tell. It does sort of lose its way about halfway for me.

PCHH was overall not thrilled by the film, and the organization's style of respectful critique with positive and negative aspects grounded in thoughtful examples was mirrored by the community on Twitter and Facebook. The Twitter feed received six threaded comments with the first half dominated by one user, @inCastrophe, who expanded on points from the podcast and pushed back on some of the negative critiques about the narrative elements and CGI. On Facebook, the narrative was similar; however, the Facebook audience was more focused on the experiences with the film. Within the 20 comments posted, similar agreement and extension of the points made by the audio critic threaded through. Most responds shared their impressions and experiences in kind with the tone set by the organization, National Public Radio and *Pop Culture Happy Hour*.

Also aligned with the routines of audience engagement and social media usage, the audio critic—that being *Pop Culture Happy Hour* as an account—did not respond, visibly moderate by posting guidelines, or clearly engage with the audience. The organization treats social media as more of an open forum for the community with little activity unless it is from a host's personal account. The routine of comment moderation by *Pop Culture Happy Hour*, who call themselves journalists and refer to the "arts desk" and other newsroom language, may be following journalist practices for online activity. Some journalists report a practice of silent observation to check in on what the community says without taking visible action or practice baseline moderation where flagged comments are simply removed (Wolfgang, Blackburn, & McConnell, 2020). Since I could not see traces of moderation from the *PCHH* accounts and I couldn't see inflammatory or extremely problematic comments, it is possible that the account is moderating only to maintain a neutral to positive platform for civic discourse in the community. On the other hand, since Linda, Ayesha, and the other hosts seem to be more active on their personal accounts they may be enacting more engagement practices for moderation and viewing the community as valuable participants. Additionally, the *PCHH* position within a legacy-backed organization increase the likelihood

that an intern or entire other department is moderating and managing the social media account. The same is probably true for *The Big Picture* and even *Show Me the Meaning*.
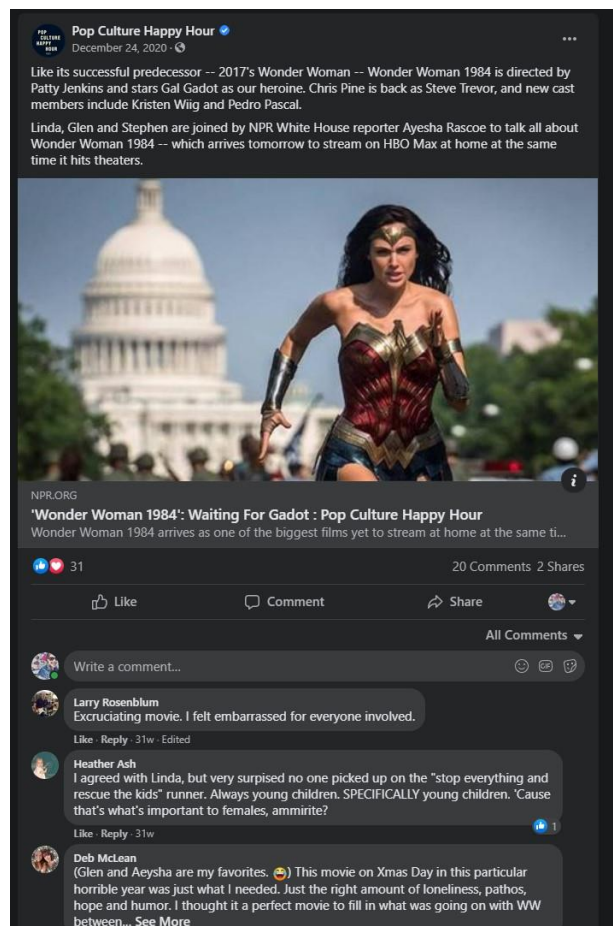
Figure 19: Social Media responses to PCHH and Wonder Woman 1984.

Similar to the response from *Pop Culture Happy Hour's* community, *Mostly Nitpicking*—who's niche is very much in entertaining logic interrogations and loving roasts of films—received positive engagement on the Wonder Woman 1984 take. The *Mostly Nitpicking* crew spent long amounts of time retelling the movie from start to finish with diverging topics of conversation as visualized by all the white lines within the discourse map. The critic didn't get to introducing the film until 42 minutes into the episode, and then talked about the movie until 208 minutes in, roughly 2.5 hours of discourse. It bounced around from unpacking the motivation logic to interrogating the narrative structures to a divergence into Aquaman villains. The conversation map diverges from the central topic into off-shoots such as how the hosts see themselves as nitpickers by "job" or how to rank DC films by their messiness. Most of the

evaluations (purpose) for their prefaces (turns in conversation) reflected an intent to roast or provided some context.

On Twitter, the *Mostly Nitpicking* account both tweeted some publicity for the episode and retweeted content from host Nando. Nando runs the YouTube channel, Nando v. Movies, where he identifies small changes in the script that might improve the narrative effect on the story. The retweet contains the link to Nando's video picking apart the "golden eagle armor" that received more engagement than the episode tweet.

Figure 20: Wonder Woman tweets related to Mostly Nitpicking

The *Mostly Nitpicking* episodes are lengthy as it retells and discusses nearly the complete films with added content. It has a running joke in the community about the "5-Star Runtimes." The <u>Wonder Woman 1984</u> episode was the longest, with 226 minutes (over 3.5 hours), which was noted by the community on Twitter and in the reviews. On Twitter, @RogerRozanski congratulated the community for the "six-star runtime" with a few likes from fellow members. The notion of run time was also brought up in two reviews over the winter ethnographic period, with one feeling more positive and other slightly more negative. Most people seem to love the long discussions and *Mostly Nitpicking* clearly resonates with the niche it has built the community around. I didn't encounter negative response to their episode and the discussion appeared to in kind with the niche.

Show Me the Meaning also appeared to please and align with expectations of the niche audience it has cultivated, largely grounded in sophisticated and academic conversations about the deeper meaning and themes within a film. The flow of the conversation mixes thematic unpacking for desire, temptation, and morality with interrogations of the plot, and audience engagement. It did not cover many topics. The group spent large chunks of minutes on single prefaces with small subtopics and statements. For nearly 15 minutes they first talk about several themes with capitalism, romance cliches and scripts, and the core of the monkey paw story coming up. Then they return for a few more minutes to unpack social themes of desire and morality. This episode did present more logic interrogation as it dug into principles of screenwriting, even considering how "if this movie didn't have a multi-million-dollar budget it could almost succeed as camp. It is just like there are all these choices that are like what are you thinking?" (Amanda, 43:01). Throughout the conversation, the discourse held a sense of analysis over roasting though.

The reviews on Apple Podcast are largely positive, like *Pop Culture Happy Hour* and *Mostly Nitpicking*, though one co-host did receive some call-outs for not living up to the level of analysis expected from the Wisecrack organization and interpretive niche. Both ShrekLoverSixtyNine and Kdmdjdjdjd mentioned Ryan as providing feedback below the higher academic level they expect. The reviews are not directly specifically at the Wonder Woman 1984 episode, and rather illuminate the niche and organization broadly that *Show Me the Meaning* exists within. Amanda was also called out—though not for her insightful contributions—but her voice. Additional research through a feminist critique lens on the influence of gender towards listener experience may be warranted as the question comes up: how does the gender of the host influence audience reaction and participation in discourse? Similar comments about Amanda Dobbins voice on *The Big Picture* appear in the reviews.

Overall, the tone that *Show Me the Meaning* sets is grounded in a deeply sophisticated critical niche, and it does tend to focus attention on thematic analysis of films. The audience seems to be a curated group of intellectuals and students, based on the number of comments oriented towards writing, writing classes, and intelligence. *Show Me the Meaning* did not have a Tweet connected to Wonder

Woman 1984, which breaks the typical routine of announcing when the episode was going to film live on YouTube. This also did not allow the community to engage directly on that post in the same way as the other audio critics, although the Wisecrack community is not overly active on Twitter with very low engagement.

To access the livestream and view any commentary, I needed to follow host Austin Hayden's twitter account (@austin_hayden). That tweet received one comment thread on the livestream link, which asked about distribution from @nordstomdanie1: "has anyone been able to see it yet?" Austin replied directly that the film was released in theaters and streaming. More commentary was observed on the initial announcement from Austin that it would be covering the film with seven threads and 40 likes. The thread contained a gif of a dumpster fire (@erebus030), asks for it to unpack Soul instead, and a few other fan reactions to the film. Austin was engaged with the discourse by prompting folks to expand on their thoughts as potential topics for the podcast and assuring others that Soul would be covered in the future. While Austin offered the opportunity to discourse the issues of film, @erebus030 did not respond back. Other community members did share some takes and suggestions, however.

In sharp contrast with the in-kind engagement that *Pop Culture Happy Hour*, *Mostly Nitpicking*, and *Show Me the Meaning* received for following the expectations set for their communities by their niches, *The Big Picture* received more backlash. *The Big Picture* spent time on subjects like critiquing the character motivations and interrogating the plot, which did not meet the expectations of a vocal segment of the audience. While the discussion diverges at times, the hosts did spend a fair amount of time focused on practices and agents in cultural production as they discussed the actor performances, the role of the director, the film compared to the genre, and the future of the franchise within the industry.

Overall, the flow of the discourse mirrored the organization, The Ringer Network's, emphasis on the entertainment industry and technical aspects of media production. *The Big Picture* offered explanations and familiarity with how movies can be situated within broader industry and popular culture systems. It seems that the audience focused on the roughly 20 minutes of roasting-type conversation

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compared to the more typical aesthetic and industry conversations. There were moments where Amanda's

tone could be perceived as mocking without care, and I think that is where the community stuck onto.

> *Sean, 16:45*
>
> *DC movies can be so weighted down by their heavy themes. And this movie is pretty fun. And even if it is imperfect, which it is imperfect, it is a fun hang in addition to being this really important movie in 2020.*

> *Amanda, 17:02*
>
> *It is not cool. And it is not trying to be cool. And it is not weighed down by the anxiety of being like [in a mocking voice], 'no but comic books are cool, and it is really important. And if we like tie all of this together and it like goes back to the other thing and also is like about my dad, like I promise it is really cool.' Which is like what all of the other DC movies are to me.*

> *Sean, 17:26*
>
> *Whose voice is that? Is that my voice? Is that Dr. DC's voice?*

> *Amanda, 17:28*
>
> *It is just like the internet. Like all of you being like give me the Snyder cut.[33] That is what all of you sound like all of the time.*

That level of open mocking of the most vocal segment of nerd culture was bound to bring ire from the

community. As I heard her comments from the play participant point of view, my personal reaction was a

little annoyed with Amanda because I do think comics are cool and the details are important. The

researcher side of me recognized that the niche and more high-brow taste culture exists outside of the

nerd culture fandom, so I understood why a lack of appreciation for the genre appeared in the tone.

The prevailing sentiment that the hosts, Amanda especially, are too hard on the genre cropped up across

their community networks. After the episode aired, *The Big Picture* received slightly more negative

feedback on the Apple Reviews. The Apple Reviews reflected more two star ratings with folks split

between perceiving passion or smugness from the critics. When it came to the super hero genre and

<u>Wonder Woman 1984</u> specifically, receiving reviews such as ZachDN1993's statement that the host,

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[33] The Synder Cut movement was a fan campaign on social media marked by #ReleasetheSynderCut after the original Justice League was released. Zack Synder stepped away from the project for personal reasons and director Joss Whedon took over. The campaign maintained a consistent visibility on Twitter, and in 2021 Warner Brothers release Zack Synder's Justice League to HBOMax, a nearly 4 hour cut of the film.

Amanda, does not appreciate pop culture as much as they would like in the community. Zach mentions Mallory Rubin, who is in the Editor-in-Chief for The Ringer, and hosts podcasts dedicated soley to "nerd culture" with her *Binge Mode* show. *Binge Mode* covered Game of Thrones, Harry Potter, Marvel, and the DC Extended Universe in depthly. And Twitter followed with similar feedback to the conversation.
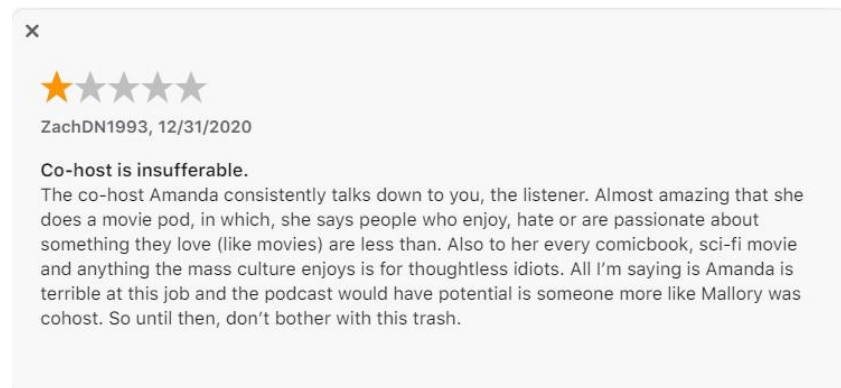
Figure 21: Review of The Big Picture's treatment of mass culture.

Of course not everyone was upset by the review and only the most bothered tend to provide visible feedback and thoughts. Yet, the largely negative response was enough for *The Big Picture* to address the feedback in a follow-up episode. It draws an explicit line between "film Twitter" and film critics by defining film Twitter: *this collection of people that just intensely argue and rant and get excited about things* (Sean, December 31, 2020, 7:00, Link). The conversation emphasized the ranting aspects of Twitter that exists alongside films, sports, and culture in general, and the position reflects sentiments unpacked by Armond White (2015) who argues that internetters mainly provide "contempt or idiocy about films, filmmakers, and film professionals" while generating backlash felt by critics to their work (pg. 217). Amanda considered the backlash received as part of the "very siloed internet experience" (6:41) and Sean brushed off the community criticism as people who "represent a fraction of the universe" when it comes to popular culture (11:05). The hosts were quite dismissive of the feedback they received and maintained their critical authority to speak about film because the average internetter feels "an urge to have your feelings certified by someone who has a louder voice than you do. And that was part of the

feedback" (Sean, 37:50). *The Big Picture* views itself as that certifier of feelings and the "someone" with a louder voice, backed by The Ringer Network organization that positions itself as a leader in entertainment, sports, and pop culture news and analysis.

The contrast between the responses to each critic's approach demonstrates the importance of the interpretive community niche. *Mostly Nitpicking* has established itself within the roasting space, and it approaches discussions with a sense of appreciation and fun even while poking at the films. *Pop Culture Happy Hour* established itself within an artistic and canonical niche, and it approached the <u>Wonder Woman 1984</u> discussion through that lens with the community following suit on social media. *The Big Picture* established itself in the technical niche and when it delivered aspects of roasting with explicit mockery of the audience, the listeners perceived an unappreciation of the genre and industry the superhero film operates within. The influence of the interpretive community forced critics like *The Big Picture* to produce over 40 additional minutes of conversation on <u>Wonder Woman 1984</u>, while the other critics continued with their regular programming routines. The influence of the organization and the niche on how critics discuss the same film manifested in clear tonal and discursive differences among the sample. The next influence on the discourse for this film is explored through the technocultures and use of the infrastructure.

3.6.2 Technocultures and Use of Infrastructure

The next visible influence in the discussion of <u>Wonder Woman 1984</u> are the technocultures employed by the audio critics. The differences in and influence of the technoculture appeared in the use of production tools that engaged the audience and included them into the active conversation; however, the use of new technologies to engage with audiences and alter production were not adopted by all critics, showing some organizational and individual levels of influence (Deuze, 2008, Shoemaker & Reese, 2014). The more broadcast-rooted critics, *Pop Culture Happy Hour* and *The Big Picture* did not leverage community-based technologies in their discourse and instead maintained the heavily one-directional routines of journalism, like their lack of community engagement moderation practices (Wolfgang, Blackburn, & McConnell, 2020). Two tools were used by *Show Me the Meaning* and *Mostly Nitpicking* to

engage further with the audience: YouTube Live and Patreon. Neither tool rests directly within this podcast-based scope for technocultures, yet they point to sites of future research as communication and social media tools.

Show Me the Meaning provides unlisted links to the live stream on YouTube, which provides a level of exclusivity and manufactures a more engaged audience tuning in, and it posts additional early access content to Patreon from the Wisecrack channel. It leverages the technologic infrastructure of YouTube combined with the pay to see format of Patreon to control who has the early or special access to the content. The podcast livestream and the Wisecrack "Wonder Woman 1984—What Went Wrong?" video are unlisted versions only accessible through the direct links. For the Show Me the Meaning livestream, the unlisted function provides some control over who has access to participate in the chat. The link is posted to Twitter, and subscribers of Wisecrack are notified when it goes live, but that simple process of link-hunting may encourage the most engaged of their community to participate. I had access to review the unlisted livestream based on saving the tweet with the original link. The livestream has 10k+ views but a fraction of that in the chat replay. Using the chat provides the opportunity for the audience to respond in real-time to the conversation, and at times the hosts would acknowledge or respond directly to the chat. Wisecrack reposts the podcast to the Wisecasts channel on the same schedule as it releases it to Spotify and podcast networks. The reupload does not include the chat history, and the reupload received 1900+ views with 21 comments. The infrastructure of livestreaming, and posting the link for the livestream more widely, allows the audience to engage and continue engaging in a very different ways from the other audio critic organizations.

All the technological infrastructure used by Show Me the Meaning in this episode reflects the interpretative niche that seeks to ground explanations in common language and be accessible to the audience. Forming a technoculture where the audience has easy paths to engage with each other speaks to the initial concept of the Wisecrack organization, which co-founder Jared Bauer described as a place to translate the intent of cultural texts in accessible ways (Bauer, 2021). Future research on YouTube livestreams might uncover useful patterns in the consumption and discourse within this technoculture.

Mostly Nitpicking also uses YouTube; however, it uses the technology in very different ways from *Show Me the Meaning*. *Mostly Nitpicking* uses YouTube to post the audio only of the podcast. It is not leveraging the livestream affordances or even video on this video platform. There were no clear differences between the YouTube and Spotify versions of the podcast, unlike *Show Me the Meaning*. The *Mostly Nitpicking* YouTube was posted on December 30, 2020, which is after one day after the Spotify release. The video has 450+ views with 16 comments. In the comments, one user Legacy of Lore was heavily active and dominated the section. This user posted nine of the 16 total comments and used the technologic infrastructure differently than the others. Legacy of Lore tagged moments of the video, providing a path of how they are commenting their reactions to the audio critics. For example, they comment at "1:37:00 you guys say it's Barbara's first day... Didn't she say she started a week ago? Not to nitpick... Of course." The community continues and embodies the discursive niche of roasting and nitpicking in many of the comments visible through platforms like YouTube. *Mostly Nitpicking* did use the description section of YouTube to help the audience by providing the "chapters" and indicating when the 40-minute <u>Mandalorian</u> recap ended, and the <u>Wonder Woman 1984</u> discussion began. *Show Me the Meaning* did not use the chapters to provide a skippable roadmap to their discussion points in the reuploads of the podcast.

Nando v Movies, the YouTube channel for primary host Nando, also posted a video about <u>Wonder Woman 1984</u> on December 31, 2020. This video continues the *Mostly Nitpicking* theme of breaking down scenes to interrogate the logic; however, Nando's video goes a step further by offering a correction to the logic. He directly connects and promotes the two mediums early in the video while identifying "nitpicking" as a central purpose of film YouTube—setting up future research questions on the YouTube field for film criticism.

> *Nando, How to Solve Wonder Woman's Golden Armor Problem, 00:31, Link*
> *But there were a lot of other parts of the movie that I did not love. You want to hear me talk about them at length? Listen to my podcast Mostly Nitpicking. We did an entire episode about Wonder Woman 1984. 5-star runtime, 5-star podcast. But now, one thing that really bugged me. Maybe more than it should have. But hey, this is film YouTube and nitpicking is our specialty. And that thing is the Golden Eagle Armor.*

Nando goes on to offer a spoiler warning and retells the last act of the film with explanations of the Golden Eagle Armor to set up his video. This video has over 85,000 views and 550 comments.

When it comes to created discourse, the use of Patreon as another technology most directly integrates the features of technology with the economic factors at play. Patreon is a platform created for creators to receive direct payments from their supporters. None of the audio critics have Patrons specifically for the podcast; rather the Patrons are set up for the related content with Wisecrack's entire network using Patreon and Nando of *Mostly Nitpicking* using the platform. Patreon unlocks extra or exclusive content based on the tier the member pays.[34] On Patreon, Wisecrack posts the audio podcast, though not as an early access because it was posted on January 15, the same day it was available on Spotify. The post did not receive much engagement, only one like. Instead of early access, the perk for the Patrons is an ad-free episode. The Patreon version is 56 minutes compared to the 61-minute runtime of the Spotify and YouTube releases. After reviewing this version, the sponsored content for SkillShare and Magic Spoon removed.

Podcasts are primarily considered an audio-based medium, yet the audiences of podcasts seem open to additional multi-media experiences. The audio-visual technocultures created by *Show Me the Meaning* and *Mostly Nitpicking* through the integration of YouTube and Patreon demonstrate the potential to engage in community discourse more actively. The future of podcast as more visual experiences may be coming as Spotify allows video embedding within the platform. This video embedding was not observed among these cases; however, the Ringer Network program *Higher Learning with Rachel Lindsay and Van Lathan* take advantage of that technological affordance. I am a Beta Tester for new Spotify features, and we may see a larger roll-out of video podcasts in the Spotify app within 2022. Until the Spotify or Apple Podcast platforms allow for video and direct participation from the audiences, critics can use YouTube with the livestream chat features, Patreon, and other social media platforms to engage

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[34] I payed $5 to Nando v Movies and $10 for Wisecrack to access the Patreon content.

with their communities. The increased visibility of engagement directly to the content that the YouTube infrastructure allows compared to podcasts presents strong research opportunities on the film discourse created. And the use of YouTube and Patreon to build an active technoculture relates to the economic factors that can influence audio critic discourses. The last section explores some of those factors seen with the Wonder Woman 1984 episode.

3.6.3 Economic Factors

The last point of comparison for influences on the audio critic content is the economic factors visible in the Wonder Woman 1984 discussions. Ten ads or market integrations appeared across the four primary review episodes for WW1984 (I excluded the fifth, follow up episode from *The Big Picture* that discussed the backlash to its WW1984 episode). *Pop Culture Happy Hour* provided the most ad breaks at five in the far shorter episode, followed by *Show Me the Meaning* at three and *The Big Picture* with two.

Table 8: Marketing data for Wonder Woman episodes.

CaseID	Text ID	Time Stamps	Role	Backing	Preface	Topic Description	Market Integration
pchh	PCHH09	0.00	Context Shepherd	Legacy-Backed	3	Ad for Peacock	Media-based
pchh	PCHH09	0.00	Context Shepherd	Legacy-Backed	3	Asking for donations to improve equipment and fund NPR	crowd-based
pchh	PCHH09	17.00	Context Shepherd	Legacy-Backed	3	Ad for Diversifund Investing	Product/Brand-Based
pchh	PCHH09	17.00	Context Shepherd	Legacy-Backed	3	Ad for Powers Gold Label Whiskey	Product/Brand-Based
pchh	PCHH09	18.00	Context Shepherd	Legacy-Backed	3	Ad for How I Built This	Media-based
wisecrack	SMTM04	13.00	Context Shepherd	Crowd-Backed	3	SponCon for Skill Share	Product/Brand-Based
wisecrack	SMTM04	35.00	Context Shepherd	Crowd-Backed	3	SponCon for Magic Spoon Cereal	Product/Brand-Based
wisecrack	SMTM04	50.00	Context Shepherd	Crowd-Backed	3	Ad for McDonalds	Product/Brand-Based
thebigpic	TBP05	1.00	Context Shepherd	Legacy-Backed	3	SponCon for hyundai with podcast guide integration	Product/Brand-Based
thebigpic	TBP05	61.00	Context Shepherd	Legacy-Backed	3	Spon Con for Heineken Beer	Product/Brand-Based

The bulk of the market integrations were from products or brand sponsorships, largely aligning with the norms of each organization. *Mostly Nitpicking*, also in line with the [non]organizational norms, did not include any market integration or visible economic influences in the episode.

The most common type of market integration was the product or brand-based advertisement. *Pop Culture Happy Hour* primarily played external ads for the high-end brands tailored towards the more privileged socio-economic imagined audiences. The connection to investing and luxury whiskey point towards the sophistication of the listeners, which aligns with the type of conversation *Pop Culture Happy Hour* had that maintained more artistic and canonical review styles. On the other hand, *The Big Picture* used the hosts to read sponsored content from more accessible brands. Hyundai and Heineken are not

overt luxury brands but do require some disposable income to afford, pointing towards the more grounded and average consumer. *Show Me the Meaning* maintained the personalized sponsored content from Magic Spoon and SkillShare, again pointing towards the audience interests in learning, growth, and customized experiences.

One difference stood out in this episode with *Show Me the Meaning*. An advertisement played from McDonald's on the Spotify release, which was abrupt and new. Perhaps Spotify had an incentive to insert this advertisement into episodes covering a high-profile film because it did not appear to be connected directly to *Show Me the Meaning* or Wisecrack. The advertisement cut the conversation off nearly mid-sentence and was a jarring overlay of content with unnormalized audio. Additionally watching the live stream version confirmed that the McDonald's ad was an external source as it did not exist in the original conversation.

For the audio critics who run advertisements, the economic influences are present, as they do stop their conversations to insert the sponsored content. The audio critics with external economic ties also tended to maintain shorter and more structured content than those without, i.e., *Mostly Nitpickings* flexibility to ramble for long run times. Most of the critics did not receive visible traces of how the economic sponsors influenced the discourse beyond the production cycles and amount of swearing associated with their work. One critic, *Show Me the Meaning*, who created the technoculture of live chatting did produce some artifacts of economic acknowledgment from the community.

The typical sponsored content from *Show Me the Meaning* was part of the conversation: Austin read and talked about Magic Spoon with no obvious cuts while his co-hosts sat quietly on camera, non-verbally reacting to the Magic Spoon ads. Magic Spoon has been a common sponsor for the channel, and the community reacted alongside the growing "inside" joke. Some were more critical about it selling out to a cereal company while others went along with the joke. A theme of commercialism being an ever-present underlying driver for art to exist was perpetuated, tscarable, while others leaned in such as IsrealGarcia's statement of "buying 60 dollars' worth of cereal."
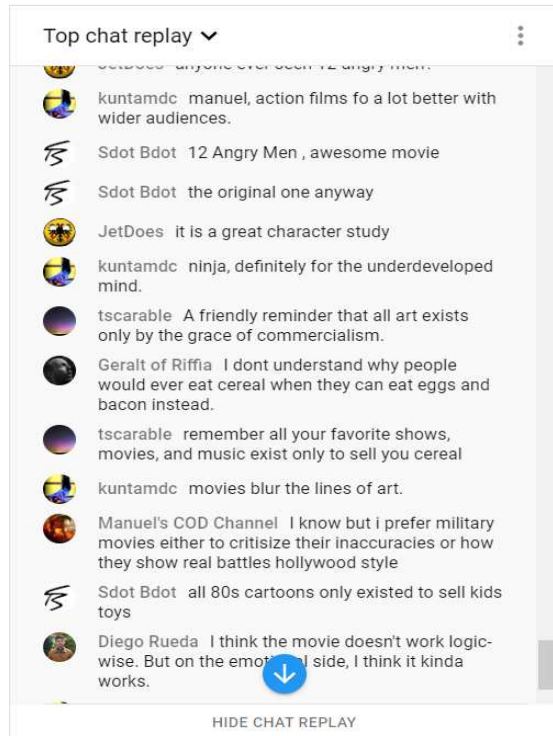
Figure 22: Chat log for Show Me the Meaning during an Ad Break

Overall, the advertisements did not derail or expand the discourse to much extent. As the space continues to formalize and attract advertisers, the ability for podcasters to maintain their creative autonomy may shift. Now, advertisers seem to be attracted to podcast networks as tastemakers and more reliable entities to sign contracts with (Sullivan, 2018). Additionally, early assessments into the effective of podcast advertising suggests that allowing the podcast to weave the sponsorships into their programming to allow for experiential marketing may drive higher returns. The risk comes with higher reward when the listenership and community is large, so companies may not be as eager to work with independent brands or those with smaller communities (Bond, 2020). That literature speaks to the external ads that the networked critics, *Pop Culture Happy Hour*, *The Big Picture*, and *Show Me the Meaning*, received compared to the lacking or silent support that *Mostly Nitpicking* and *Black Girl Film Club* operated within as independent creators.

Some critics used community funding in complement or instead of external economic forces. *Pop Culture Happy Hour* asked for community donations during its early funding drive, which ended before

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the Wonder Woman 1984 episode aired. *Mostly Nitpicking* has connections to the NandoVMovies

Patreon; however, the visible discourse and influences were related explicitly to the NandoVMovies

content and not the audio critic podcast. *Show Me the Meaning* leveraged the technologic infrastructure of

YouTube for membership donations, which it received one during the Wonder Woman 1984 stream.

The donations could serve as a mechanism to increase the cultural capital of the community members

because it highlights their comment. However, in this case it seems to be used by trolls or contrarians to

promote sarcastic and mean-spirited commentary on the actress in the film or conspiracies of the industry.

The same account, DB, spent 25 Euros during this stream. The second comment, worth 20 Euros, spoke

more so to the niche of the audio critic by pointing out the economic influences on film promotion. The

hosts did not engage with either post.
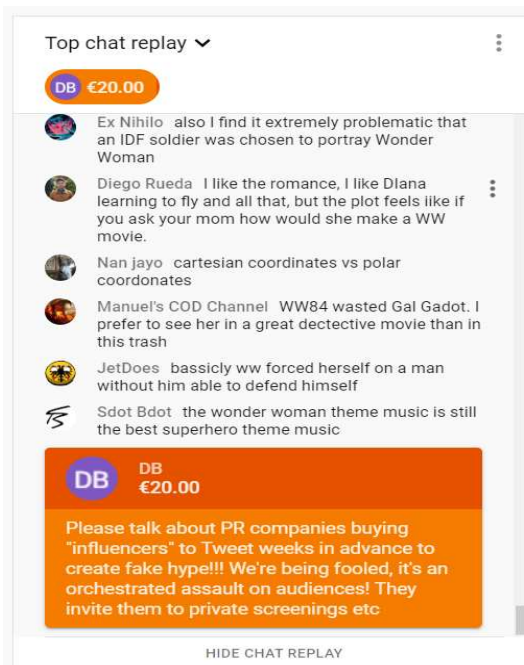
Figure 23: Donations used to attempt influence over the discourse.

The economic influences during the Wonder Woman 1984 episode highlighted some of the

organizational differences among the audio critics in who sponsored their content and how that aligns

with their critical niches. The networked critics received external funding sources that reflected their

imagined audience share. More expensive brands advertised with *Pop Culture Happy Hour's* canonical

and artistic niche while more individualized brands sponsored *Show Me the Meaning* with the interpretive and reflective community niche. *Mostly Nitpicking* doesn't receive external funding and may be perceived as too joking or non-serious to attract advertisers already weary of independent creators. Overall, the influence of economics is a topic still being explored and formalized within the podcast space and worth pursing future projects about. In this case, the established organization and type of discourse attracted certain sponsors perhaps more than certain sponsored influenced the discourse—at least from the visible artifacts. Additional studies with interviews from the hosts or business managers would provide more insight into the depth of influence that advertisers may develop on audio critics moving forward.

3.7 Chapter Summary: Reflecting on the Cases

As a qualitative study with an ethnographic approach, I acted as a play participant to familiarize myself with the communities surrounding the five audio critics sampled. Over the 5-week period, I consumed over 55 hours of their audio content in addition to exploring their other paths of interaction and revenue. The case study analysis of this chapter explained how each critic approached film reviewing as influenced by their organization and maintained through their critical niche. In the end, a direct comparison of a single film exemplified how so many podcasters can exist in the space by finding and targeting their own fragment of the listener base. Every critic reviewed the same film through distinct frames of discourse, which provides alternative experiences for the audience.

The case studies represented legacy-backed organizations, i.e., *Pop Culture Happy Hour* and *The Big Picture*, with formalized networks of resources—and certainly control and constraints—coming from the organizational level of influence. *Pop Culture Happy Hour* produced shorter, daily episodes that could neatly fit into a 30-minute radio broadcast window while *The Big Picture* interviewed directors and actors because The Ringer Network has the resources and connections to secure that type of content. The study also represented crowd-backed organizations without larger structures directly overseeing their work that generated different influences on their routines and style of review. *Mostly Nitpicking* could offer very long episodes because it diverges in topics of conversation and don't need to follow typical "workday" production expectations. It doesn't have sponsors to keep in mind and produce episodes on "bad" movies.

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While *Show Me the Meaning* leans heavily into viewer participation from their crowd-backed roots, it does answer to a larger network of content with sponsorship deals and standards to maintain. It produced content around the same 60-minute mark with regular advertising breaks for the sponsored content. And *Black Girl Film Club* produced the fewest episodes, and even skipped the Wonder Woman 1984 release, as it doesn't have an organization influencing the content with routines of gatewatching for what films will draw the most audience to the content and dominate the discourse. Instead, it selected older or more obscure films to discuss. The organization, and by extension the potential advertising contracts, held influence on the audio critics in their production routines and the types of films they covered.

Within the organization, the case study analysis found four distinct critical niches that the audio critics spoke within. These niches guided the content produced, from the first impressions to the types of synopses and throughout the topics of conversations. The interpretative niche, which grounds interpretations of a text to be accessible reflected a very contextual approach to review. *Show Me the Meaning* and *Black Girl Film Club* provided first impressions that set up these interpretations and contextualized their experiences of the film within social frameworks. Their critical niche guided the discourses into more thematic analyses and opportunities for their listeners to grow and learn. *Pop Culture Happy Hour* existed within a canonical niche as it took a classic approach to film review by setting up the audience for non-spoiler reviews with more focus on the artistic qualities and mechanics of narrative storytelling. The episodes were consistently less than 30 minutes with highly structured conversations that ultimately helped the audience decide if they wanted to engage further with the film and understand the narrative better. *The Big Picture* was the most focused on the industry as it facilitated a technical niche that consistently elevated the practices of film production and the Hollywood industry. It typically turned the conversations towards the director's contributions, the actors' performances, and the business of filmmaking while their organization allowed them to pull in interviews with agents of the industry. And then *The Big Picture* did not elevate and celebrate a film and genre, as we saw with Wonder Woman 1984, the community rejected the divergence from the niche. And last, *Mostly Nitpicking* was extremely fun and funny as it offered an affective niche to talk the listeners through a very personal

telling of the thoughts and experiences with the movies. The runtimes were "5-Star" and well over two hours, yet the community it found was with it throughout. Each case displayed its own personality and routines for audience interaction while maintaining several key similarities. The similarities in how they started their episodes, presented the first impressions of the films, offered a synopsis to the story, and ended their episodes point towards field-level routines and a habitus for audio critics as a formalized space of criticism. The genres that they followed and routines that appeared across the sample will be explored in Chapter 4: Genres and Routines of Film Criticism.

CHAPTER 4.   GENRES AND ROUTINES OF FILM CRITICISM

This chapter builds on the individual case analysis by considering the collective actions of the audio critic group to respond to the research question, **how do the discursive activities of audio critics intersect with generic forms of film criticism**? After analyzing the audio critics individually, I turned to the routine and social levels of media sociology analysis to explore what the group held in common as film reviewers and which genres of review emerged. This chapter maps the activities across the sample to identify discursive genres. Discursive genre represents how a text, the podcast episode, contributes to social interactions and social events (Fairclough, 2003). The social event in this study is the way a film is reviewed and critiqued by audio critics. The discursive genres and the routines that the audio critics held in common are visualized through discourse maps that categorized the prefaces—shifts in the topic of conversation and the evaluations—or purposes of the conversation (Young, 2004). The narrative analysis through the discourse map uncovered what audio critics bring to the audiences' attention and how audio critics guide interactions with the texts. I observed that audio critics follow recognizable genres from writing about film, such as screening reports and critical reviews, and routines that can be argued as habitus structures for podcast critics. The routines that emerged were common practices outside of the niche or organization's influence, such as giving first impressions of the film and signing off the podcast in conversational ways.

This chapter presents two primary sections. The first responds to the research question to what extent do audio critics follow legacy routines of film criticism. The short answer is that audio critics do follow legacy genre structures for the critical review, the movie review, and the screening report. I note a limitation in the sample's demonstration of theoretical reviews that relate cinematic arguments to the socio-political aspects of cultural reality. While audio critics did review films with racial salience such as Soul, very few provided robust dialog on the history, experiences, or influence of Blackness in culture the way a legacy, written theoretical review might.

After unpacking the overlap with established practices, I describe the emergent genres from the sample in a subsection: the rank and review, the news and culture review, the logic interrogation, and the podcast production review that appeared for audio critics without clear parallels to the cited literature. The rank and review, seen most with journalist-adjacent critics, provide the audience with listicles of content related to a theme. For example, *The Big Picture* offered a rank and review of the George Clooney Hall of Fame (December 23, 2020) and *Pop Culture Happy Hour* offered a list of 2020 Christmas Movies and TV (December 2, 2020). The news and culture review provides updates on current events in the film and art world, pointing towards the connection between legacy cultural journalists and audio critics. Again, the legacy-backed audio critics typically provided these news-centered episodes, especially the technical niche of *The Big Picture* with industry events and updates. The logic interrogation was consistently practiced by *Mostly Nitpicking* as it picked apart the internal logic and continuity of a film. At times, all of the critics roasted aspects of the movies because the nature of a long-form conversation may inevitably lead to some discussion of the details and plot holes; however, logic interrogation as a discursive genre requires both community buy-in and an underlying appreciation for the text as evidenced by the community backlash to *The Big Picture's* roast of Wonder Woman 1984 compared to the positive reactions from the affective niche of *Mostly Nitpicking*. The framework of logic interrogation offers a highly intriguing place for continued research and community value. And the final emerging genre was the podcast production review, where the audio critics offered year-end reflections on the work they produced.

The last half of the chapter responds to the question of which discursive activities form a habitus for audio criticism as a field of practice. The patterns across the prefaces—the changes in conversation topics—demonstrated evidence that audio critics, despite their organizational influences and niche positioning, follow higher-order routines for providing a first impression and synopsis. The influences coming from the institutional level reflect the hyper-fragmented and competitive marketplace that audio critics reside within (Shoemaker & Reese, 2014). Audio critics need to quickly identify themselves and their niche of critical review to the audience in the crowded space of podcasting: routines for the branded

openings, the first impressions and film synopsis, and friendly sign-offs allow podcasters to position themselves to their interpretive communities. For example, the distinct "Goodbye from Hollywood, California. This has been Show Me the Meaning!" signals the end of the conversation (goodbye is a common phrase to end interpersonal interactions), identifies the audio critic within film culture (the reference to Hollywood), and reminds the audience whom to look for in their podcast feed (stating the name as the last thing the listeners hears). Additionally, the expectation of podcasts to provide a consistent and intimate experience for the audience reflects a social level influence that may drive the routines seen across the five cases, no matter their organization or niche of discourse. All the critics offered first impressions in the opening one-third of the conversation, which provides setup for the topics of the episode in which the listener can choose to continue in the experience or drop out.

The chapter ends with a summary and reflection on how the discursive genres and the routines of audio critics allow consumers and researchers an opportunity to categorize podcast work for casual listening and scholarship. The niche of the critic was readily identifiable through these routines because each critic approached the practice in individual ways, influenced by the hosts individual-level values and the organizational-level expectations for the niche and network. Future research projects can use the findings about genre and routines in this study to categorize and explore much larger datasets of audio critics by limiting the scope to either the genre types or the routines identified.

4.1 To what extent do audio critics follow legacy routines of film criticism?

This research followed five audio critics that varied in terms of audience size, organization, funding structure, and community niche. I listened to each episode produced in the sampling period (n=47). While listening closely to the content, I noted the general topics and the evaluations (the uses of the conversation) for each turn in the discourse (Young, 2004). I also listened more loosely as a play participant while logging notes in my field journal, which informed the formalized categorization process in the codebook. The codebook included two primary data tabs, one for the macro-level data on each episode and another for the micro-level analysis of the discourse. The codebook allowed me to sort, filter, and visualize how the legacy and emergent routines of film criticism manifested in this sample. **NOTE:**

17 episodes were not single film reviews in this sample. They were still observed and recorded in the macro-level data to inform discursive genres and understand the collective patterns of the group but did not receive a micro-level analysis of the discourse because I am asking about the discourse of film criticism specifically.

Table 9: Summary Data for Sample

Production Data				High Level Structure				Aspect of Activity	
CaseID	TextID	Text Title	Style	Backing	Niche	Genre 1	Genre 2	Evaluation	Evaluation 2
blkgirlfilmclub	BGFC01	Natural Born Killers (1994)	Story Teller	Crowd-Backed	Interpretive	Screening Report	Theoretical Review	Aesthetic	Socio-Political
blkgirlfilmclub	BGFC02	Batman Returns (1992)	Story Teller	Crowd-Backed	Interpretive	Screening Report	Critical Review	Entertainment	Socio-Political
blkgirlfilmclub	BGFC03	Her Smell (2018)	Story Teller	Crowd-Backed	Interpretive	Screening Report	Theoretical Review	Socio-Political	Aesthetic
blkgirlfilmclub	X1BGFC	2020 Year in Review	Story Teller	Crowd-Backed	Affective	Podcast Production Review	News and Culture Review	Contextual	Entertainment
nitpickingpod	MNP01	Jiu Jitsu	Story Teller	Crowd-Backed	Affective	Logic Interrogation	Screening Report	Aesthetic	Roast
nitpickingpod	MNP02	The Christmas Chronicles Part 2	Story Teller	Crowd-Backed	Affective	Logic Interrogation	Screening Report	Roast	Industry
nitpickingpod	MNP03	Tenet	Story Teller	Crowd-Backed	Affective	Logic Interrogation	Movie Review	Industry	Roast
nitpickingpod	MNP04	Wonder Woman 1984	Story Teller	Crowd-Backed	Affective	Movie Review	Logic Interrogation	Roast	Industry
nitpickingpod	X1MNP	Looking Back at 2020 and Looking Forward to 2021	Story Teller	Crowd-Backed	Affective	Podcast Production Review	News and Culture Review	Entertainment	Industry
pchh	PCHH01	2020 Christmas Movies and TV: Happiest Season, Hallmark, and More	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	Canonical	Content Rank and Review	Movie Review	Socio-Political	Aesthetic
pchh	PCHH02	Mank and What's Making Us Happy	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	Canonical	Movie Review	Critical Review	Aesthetic	Entertainment
pchh	PCHH03	Scott Pilgrim Vs. the World	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	Canonical	Critical Review	Screening Report	Aesthetic	Socio-Political
pchh	PCHH04	The Prom and What's Making Us Happy	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	Canonical	Movie Review	Critical Review	Aesthetic	Socio-Political
pchh	PCHH05	Small Axe	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	Interpretive	Theoretical Review	Critical Review	Socio-Political	Industry
pchh	PCHH06	Ma Rainey's Black Bottom	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	Canonical	Movie Review	Critical Review	Contextual	Aesthetic
pchh	PCHH07	Tenet	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	Affective	Movie Review	Critical Review	Entertainment	Aesthetic
pchh	PCHH08	The Midnight Sky	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	Canonical	Movie Review	Critical Review	Aesthetic	Contextual
pchh	PCHH09	Wonder Woman 1984 and What's Making Us Happy	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	Canonical	Movie Review	Logic Interrogation	Aesthetic	Roast
pchh	PCHH10	Soul	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	Canonical	Movie Review	Critical Review	Aesthetic	Socio-Political
pchh	PCHH11	Coco	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	Interpretive	Critical Review	Theoretical Review	Socio-Political	Aesthetic
pchh	x10PCHH	Our 2021 Pop Culture Resolutions and What's Making Us Happy	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	Canonical	Podcast Production Review	News and Culture Review	Contextual	Entertainment
pchh	x1PCHH	BTS	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	Canonical	News and Culture Review	Content Rank and Review	Socio-Political	Industry
pchh	x2PCHH	Mariah Carey	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	Canonical	Content Rank and Review	News and Culture Review	Aesthetic	Industry
pchh	x3PCHH	Saved by the Bell	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	Canonical	Movie Review	Critical Review	Aesthetic	Socio-Political
pchh	x4PCHH	Bad Bunny	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	Canonical	Content Rank and Review	Critical Review	Aesthetic	Socio-Political
pchh	x5PCHH	2020 Best Books: Realistic Fiction	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	Canonical	Content Rank and Review	Critical Review	Aesthetic	Industry
pchh	x6PCHH	Taylor Swifts Evermore	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	Canonical	Critical Review	Content Rank and Review	Aesthetic	Industry
pchh	x7PCHH	The Flight Attendant	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	Canonical	Movie Review	Critical Review	Aesthetic	Industry
pchh	x8PCHH	2020 Pop Culture Favorites	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	Canonical	Content Rank and Review	News and Culture Review	Aesthetic	Entertainment
pchh	x9PCHH	Our 2021 Pop Culture Predictions	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	Canonical	News and Culture Review	Podcast Production Review	Industry	Entertainment
thebigpic	TBP01	Mank is Here. Does David Fincher's Movie Live Up	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	Technical	Critical Review	News and Culture Review	Industry	Aesthetic
thebigpic	TBP02	The Steven Soderbergh Rankings: Featuring Steven Soderbergh	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	Technical	Movie Review	News and Culture Review	Industry	Contextual
thebigpic	TBP03	Rewatching Tenet (At Home) in the Year of Christopher Nolan. Plus Steve Mc	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	Technical	Screening Report	News and Culture Review	Industry	Aesthetic
thebigpic	TBP04	The Top 20 Performances of 2020 and Ma Rainey's Black Bottom	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	Technical	News and Culture Review	Movie Review	Industry	Aesthetic
thebigpic	TBP05	Wonder Woman 1984 is here, on HBO Max. Plus: Paul Greengrass	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	Technical	Movie Review	Screening Report	Aesthetic	Industry
thebigpic	TBP06	The Genius of Pixar's Soul and Wonder Woman 1984	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	Technical	Movie Review	News and Culture Review	Entertainment	Socio-Political
thebigpic	x1TBP	Mank Week: The Importance of Citizen Kane and Orsen Welles	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	Technical	News and Culture Review	Theoretical Review	Industry	Aesthetic
thebigpic	x2TBP	Emergency Pod: Did Movie Theaters Just Die	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	Technical	News and Culture Review	Podcast Production Review	Industry	Contextual
thebigpic	x3TBP	Top 5 Movies of 2020	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	Technical	Content Rank and Review	Critical Review	Industry	Aesthetic
thebigpic	X5TBP	Hollywood is at War with Itself: Plus the Inagural "You Blew It!" Awards	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	Technical	News and Culture Review	Podcast Production Review	Industry	Entertainment
thebigpic	X6TBP	The George Clooney Hall of Fame: Plus Carey Mulligan and Emerald Fennell	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	Technical	Content Rank and Review	Critical Review	Industry	Aesthetic
thebigpic	X7TBP	The 1995 Movie Draft	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	Technical	Content Rank and Review	News and Culture Review	Industry	Entertainment
wisecrack	SMTM01	Ferris Bueller's Day Off (Directed by John Huges)-American Psycho Jr.	Traditional	Crowd-Backed	Interpretive	Critical Review	Theoretical Review	Socio-Political	Aesthetic
wisecrack	SMTM02	Ready Player One (Directed by Steven Spielborg)-Empty Nostalgia or Fitting T	Traditional	Crowd-Backed	Interpretive	Theoretical Review	Critical Review	Socio-Political	Aesthetic
wisecrack	SMTM03	Bad Santa (Directed by Terry Zwigoff)-Finally a Christmas Movie for the Rest	Traditional	Crowd-Backed	Interpretive	Critical Review	Screening Report	Socio-Political	Aesthetic
wisecrack	SMTM04	Wonder Woman 1984 (Directed by Patty Jenkins): Wonder or Blunder?	Traditional	Crowd-Backed	Interpretive	Logic Interrogation	Movie Review	Roast	Socio-Political
wisecrack	SMTM05	Soul (Directed by Pete Doctor)-Jazzin	Traditional	Crowd-Backed	Interpretive	Critical Review	Theoretical Review	Socio-Political	Entertainment

The codebook also contains data for the release dates and lengths and the frequencies of audience interactions and advertisements, not shown in the table. Each episode was categorized by Genre 1 and Genre 2, the conversation most embodied as well as the overarching purposes for the conversation. The categorizing was guided by the clear definitions in the codebook and assessed through the overall impressions I perceived after careful listening, reviewing my real-time notes, and revisiting the texts.

This section reports how audio critics participated in film conversations through genre and evaluation classifications. The genre classifications reflect a grouping of discursive activities that create a recognizable social event (Fairclough, 2003). At an average length of 72 minutes per episode, the sample covered a lot of topics. To determine the primary and secondary genres, I focused on what most of the episode provided and interpreted my observations with flexibility in mind. While certain evaluations such

as roasting tended to appear within logic interrogations or aesthetic evaluations tended to appear within critical reviews, the evaluation type is not exclusive to a genre event. For example, Aesthetic, Industry, and Socio-Political evaluations consistently appear in multiple genres. A stronger indicator of the evaluation type is the critical niche that the audio critic facilitates, with canonical niches typically having conversations grounded by the aesthetic of the texts. The genres were categorized based on Corrigan (2015) who published guides on writing about film, indicated with an underline in the table, and others that emerged through the listening and analysis process. The evaluation types were created based primarily on the Schools of Criticism (McWhirter, 2016) and emergent data from the analysis process.

Table 10: Genre and Evaluation Types of Audio Criticism

Event Type (Genre)	grouping of discursive interactions within social event
Screening Report	descriptions of shots and scenes to drive the primary discussions
Movie Review	summaries of plot and context with recommendations for the audience
Theoretical Review	arguments about cinematic representation to explain complex socio-political structures
Critical Review	deconstruction of narrative and production choices to reveal nuance in cinematic storytelling
Logic Interrogation	interrogation of the internal logic structures and continuity in cinematic storytelling
News and Culture Review	providing updates and context on current events related to art and industry
Podcast Production Review	reflecting on the content and state of the podcast
Content Rank and Review	ranking sets of similar content or texts
Evaluation Type	uses of conversations for the primary interactants
Aesthetic	focus on the look, quality, and artistic merits
Socio-Political	focus on the cultural impacts and social connections
Entertainment	focus on the viewing experience and affect
Industry	focus on the system of production culture
Contextual	focus on sharing general information and context
Roast	focus on the inconsistencies and logic gaps

I observed *eight* frequently and consistently occurring, therefore recognizable, *event types (genres)* across the sample of conversations. Half of the event types align with legacy genres of written criticism, underlined in the table, while four of the event types emerged from the ethnography. Within the genre of a podcast episode, I observed and classified the evaluations. I recognized *six evaluation types*

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across the sample, and these evaluations informed what critical niche the audio critic facilitated. For

example, *Mostly Nitpicking* typically roasted or focused on the viewing experience as entertainment and

the community niche emerged as affective to share an experience with the audience.

Table 11: Genre Data for MNP

MNP01	Jiu Jitsu	Story Teller	Crowd-Backed	Affective	Logic Interrogation	Screening Report	Roast	Entertainment
MNP02	The Christmas Chronicles Part 2	Story Teller	Crowd-Backed	Affective	Logic Interrogation	Screening Report	Roast	Entertainment
MNP03	Tenet	Story Teller	Crowd-Backed	Affective	Logic Interrogation	Movie Review	Industry	Roast
MNP04	Wonder Woman 1984	Story Teller	Crowd-Backed	Affective	Movie Review	Logic Interrogation	Roast	Entertainment
X1MNP	Looking Back at 2020 and Looking Forward to 2021	Story Teller	Crowd-Backed	Affective	Podcast Production Review	News and Culture Review	Entertainment	Industry

And on the other hand, *The Big Picture* almost always had an industry focus to the conversations and

emerged within the technical niche of criticism.

Table 12: Genre Data for TBP

CaseID	TextID	Text Title	Style	Backing	Niche	Genre 1	Genre 2	Evaluation	Evaluation 2
thebigpic	TBP01	Mank is Here. Does David Fincher's Movie Live Up	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	Technical	Critical Review	News and Culture Review	Industry	Aesthetic
thebigpic	TBP02	The Steven Soderbergh Rankings: Featuring Steven	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	Technical	Movie Review	News and Culture Review	Industry	Contextual
thebigpic	TBP03	Rewatching Tenet (At Home) in the Year of Christo	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	Technical	Screening Report	News and Culture Review	Industry	Aesthetic
thebigpic	TBP04	The Top 20 Performances of 2020 and Ma Rainey's E	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	Technical	News and Culture Review	Movie Review	Industry	Aesthetic
thebigpic	TBP05	Wonder Woman 1984 is here, on HBO Max. Plus: Pa	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	Technical	Movie Review	Screening Report	Aesthetic	Industry
thebigpic	TBP06	The Genius of Pixar's Soul and Wonder Woman 198	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	Technical	Movie Review	News and Culture Review	Entertainment	Socio-Political
thebigpic	x1TBP	Mank Week: The Importance of Citizen Kane and O	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	Technical	News and Culture Review	Theoretical Review	Industry	Aesthetic
thebigpic	x2TBP	Emergency Pod: Did Movie Theaters Just Die	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	Technical	News and Culture Review	Podcast Production Review	Industry	Contextual
thebigpic	x3TBP	Top 5 Movies of 2020	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	Technical	Content Rank and Review	Critical Review	Industry	Aesthetic
thebigpic	X5TBP	Hollywood is at War with Itself: Plus the Inagural "	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	Technical	News and Culture Review	Podcast Production Review	Industry	Entertainment
thebigpic	X6TBP	The George Clooney Hall of Fame: Plus Carey Mulli	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	Technical	Content Rank and Review	Critical Review	Industry	Aesthetic
thebigpic	X7TBP	The 1995 Movie Draft	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	Technical	Content Rank and Review	News and Culture Review	Industry	Entertainment

Both the evaluation types and the ultimate niche that the audio critics spoke within pointed to the genres

that the critics provided and how their patterns of conversation intersect with legacy routines of criticism.

The audio critics followed the same general practices of criticism as ancient and modern legacy

critics. The connotation of a critic is tied to the evaluation of a text with some level of attention to the

socio-politics of the time, both time of text creation and time of viewing (McWhirter, 2016). The

ontology of criticism is one of the debates of the field, asking what is the reality and thus purpose of

criticism? Some argue the purpose rests in educating or articulating hidden meaning in the text, or in

creating a dialogue with audience, or perhaps contextualizing the work in society, while others posit the

function should aim to evaluate with reason (Frey, 2015). Underneath the different approaches to the

purpose of a critic, the notion of talking about a film in context to viewers remains a foundation. Those

who write about films are expected to address the narrative, characters, elements of the mise-en-scène,

and some ideological or cultural themes of the text (Corrigan, 2015). These audio critics maintained those aspects of evaluation practices by routinely discussing the plotting and narrative beats, unpacking the character arcs and actor performances, dissecting the impacts of wardrobe, highlighting aspects of the set design, and commenting on socio-political intersections of the product. For example, the conversation maps with just the prefaces sorted of the first episodes from *Pop Culture Happy Hour*, *Show Me the Meaning*, and *The Big Picture* reflect discussions on the character dynamics and arcs, the impact of wardrobe design, and the setting and tone details.

CaseID	Text ID	Time Stamps	Style	Backing	Preface	Topic Description
pchh	PCHH01	0.00	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	1	Introduction to the panel and episode topics
pchh	PCHH01	1.00	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	1	Provide the synopsis of the content with all the stars (Happiest Season)
pchh	PCHH01	2.00	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	1	Go around the panel sharing the reactions to performance and characters dynamics with social themes
pchh	PCHH01	7.00	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	1	Highlight Glenn (Queer) host's perspective on queer holiday movies
pchh	PCHH01	9.00	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	1	Discuss the impacts of the Hallmark channel producing queer stories
wisecrack	SMTM01	1.00	Traditional	Crowd-Backed	1	Provide overview of episode and introductions for the panel
wisecrack	SMTM01	4.00	Traditional	Crowd-Backed	1	Roundtable to share impressions and opening thoughts
wisecrack	SMTM01	10.00	Traditional	Crowd-Backed	1	Provide the thorough retelling of the narrative
wisecrack	SMTM01	16.00	Traditional	Crowd-Backed	1	Discuss the Director's filmography and cultural values
wisecrack	SMTM01	21	Traditional	Crowd-Backed	1	Unpacking the time period of the film and what the genre rep
wisecrack	SMTM01	30.00	Traditional	Crowd-Backed	1	Unpack the central theme of Freedom and Anti-Capitalism
wisecrack	SMTM01	38.00	Traditional	Crowd-Backed	1	Discuss the Character ARCS
wisecrack	SMTM01	47.00	Traditional	Crowd-Backed	1	Discuss the impact of wardrobe design
wisecrack	SMTM01	50.00	Traditional	Crowd-Backed	1	Moving into the MailBag with comments from previous episodes
thebigpic	TBP01	0.00	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	1	Opening with the overview of the episode
thebigpic	TBP01	4.00	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	1	Providing some context around why this episode is exciting for hosts and what they appreciated about it
thebigpic	TBP01	5.00	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	1	Provide the back story and context for Mank with production and the creative process in mind
thebigpic	TBP01	9.00	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	1	Unpack the spirit of the source material and key themes from the source film
thebigpic	TBP01	12.00	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	1	Setting expectations for the viewer to understand the setting, tone, and medium
thebigpic	TBP01	21.00	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	1	Critique the film making style and artistic design
thebigpic	TBP01	27.00	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	1	Contextualize what the movie means to Hollywood system
thebigpic	TBP01	46.00	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	1	Explore the controversy associated with biopic genre and souce material
thebigpic	TBP01	50.00	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	1	Provide rich analysis of the character and actor-study
thebigpic	TBP01	63.00	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	1	Connect the film as a vehicle for modern political issues
thebigpic	TBP01	69.00	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	1	Consider the prospects of the film within Oscar discussions/race
thebigpic	TBP01	87.00	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	1	Rank the film within the Director's career
thebigpic	TBP01	89.00	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	1	Final recommendations for watching the film or not

Figure 24: Snippet of Discourse Map

Beyond the basic level of critical discussion, the audio critic sample also upheld four primary generic forms of film writing: though adapted to the new medium. Most film writing falls into one of four genres: screening report, movie review, theoretical essay, and critical essay (Corrigan, 2015). Again, I coded a primary and secondary genre for each podcast episode because the length of conversation often led to two salient event types for genre.

The most common primary genre from the audio critics was the Movie Review followed by the Content Rank and Review, News and Culture Review, and then Critical Review. The breakdown of genre event types points towards an audio critic purpose grounded in reviewing films for the audience but also heavily interested in contextualizing films within similar works or larger news and culture events.

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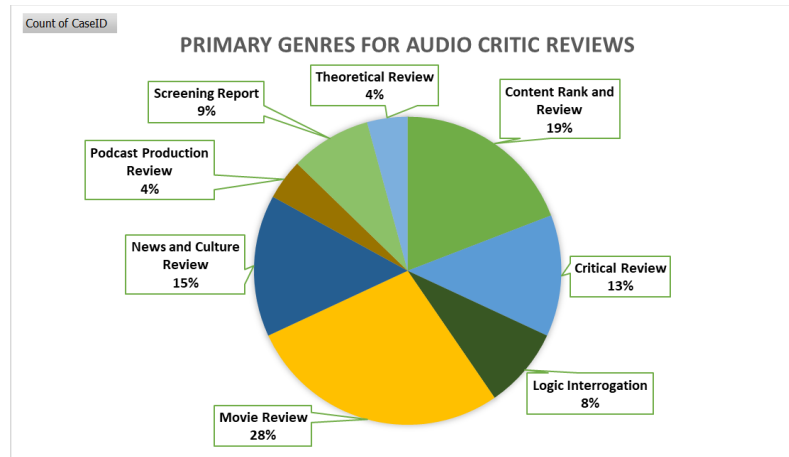
Figure 25: Chart showing the Genre Distribution of the Sample

A movie review summarizes the plot and provides recommendations for the audience with deep roots in the legacy publication of criticism (Corrigan, 2015). It provides context about the genre, director, and actors while letting the audience know what to expect in the film with an assumption that the audience has not yet seen the movie. The review includes statements like "I had a perfectly nice time with this movie. I like these actors a whole lot, that helps. I recommend it if you are up for a quiet, kind of strangely mournful weekend afternoon viewing" (*Pop Culture Happy Hour*, December 22, 2020, 4:57) or "I think this really works. I think it is quieter than you might expect from a Steven Soderberg film because a large part of it is improvised: there is not that neatness of dialog. Which again I think is interesting….it feels contained. It feels like we did it, and we thought through some feelings. And now we move on, and filmmakers of his caliber aren't doing that anymore, in any capacity" (*The Big Picture*, December 10, 2020, 6:42). Neither critic spoiled the plot or gave away too many details in their conversations about The Midnight Sky (*Pop Culture Happy Hour*) or Let Them Talk[35] (*The Big Picture*) while guiding the audience on what to expect.

The frequent presence of movie reviews in the audio critic sample demonstrates that this field maintains a core purpose from legacy criticism and that audiences still desire recommendations from

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[35] Let Them Talk, 2020. *A famous author goes on a cruise trip with her friends and nephew in an effort to find fun and happiness while she comes to terms with her troubled past.*

perceived experts, or at least those with granted authority within the interpretive community. The routine of movie review was strongest among the affiliated critics who belong to organizations rooted in legacy journalism models. The audio critics with hosts who identify as journalists or folks who work the "arts desk" contributed most of the movie review genre. Those critics, *Pop Culture Happy Hour* and *The Big Picture* followed classic routines for written criticism in directing the taste culture, conveying views on the film, providing advertisement for the film or director, and positing viewing recommendations to the audience (Frey & Sayad, 2015; McWhirter, 2016). The crowd-backed audio critics tended to enact less of those traditional functions of criticism, opting instead for more screening reports or emergent genres of criticism.

Critical Reviews reflected the second highest traditional genre but were behind the new rank and review and news and culture genres. Critical reviews deconstruct the narrative and production choices to reveal cinematic or artistic nuances to the audience. A critical review might remind the audience about major themes and plot details to then focus on explanations of how specific scenes, characters, and details function in the story (Corrigan, 2015). The critical reviews were frequently observed with socio-political and aesthetic evaluations in the conversation, pointing towards audio critics providing some interpretations of art and cultural connections for the audience. The potential for podcast listeners to receive cultural interpretations from media positions audio critics to contribute aspects critical consciousness raising or elevation of taste cultures, in line with traditional functions of art and film critics (Gans, 1999). Podcasts could offer accessible and entertaining forms of critical discourses and interpretation for audiences who may not engage in nuanced discourses otherwise.

Pop Culture Happy Hour most frequently combined the movie review and the critical review to provide those nuanced interpretations about film with recommendations and broad thoughts around the film. For example, in the episode on Ma Rainey's Black Bottom on December 17, 2020, it started with a more contextual conversation about the production and actors before sharing the aesthetic first impressions and then analysis. The structure of the conversation led the audience into racially salient,

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socio-political aspects in foundational steps to remain accessible on a topic, American racism, that can be uncomfortable to confront.

Text ID	Time Stamps	Style	Backing	Preface	Topic Description	Evaluation
PCHH06	1.00	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	1	Provide the overview of the film and panel introductions	Contextual
PCHH06	2.00	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	1	Provide the film synopsis with some extra context	Contextual
PCHH06	3.00	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	1	Share impressions from the panel with emphasis on actor performances	Aesthetic
PCHH06	13.00	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	1	Discussion of the theme of respect and art intersceting with culture	Socio-Political
PCHH06	15.00	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	1	Deeper Dive into the source material and how it translates across mediums	Aesthetic
PCHH06	17.00	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	1	Provide final recommendations on seeing it	Entertainment
PCHH06	20.00	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	1	Provide the other pop culture recommendations (What's Making Us Happy)	Entertainment

Figure 26: Discourse Map for PCHH on Ma Rainey's Black Bottom

In the Ma Rainey's Black Bottom[36] episode, Aisha Harris, Joelle Monique (@joellemonique), Linda Holmes, and Stephen Thompson warmed the audience up by explaining the premise and praising the actors' performances, as expected in a movie review.

> *Linda, 3:33, [Link](#)*
> *Joelle, you said you were very excited to talk about this movie. Tell me what you thought.*
>
> *Joelle,*
> *Oh my gosh. Oh Linda. I love it. It is hard to put into words how much I enjoyed it and all the reasons. But Chadwick Boseman, this being his final performance devastates. I think recently Denzel Washington in an interview said that he [Boseman] didn't lose anything, we lost him. He gave everything he had to give while he was here. So, for me, it is probably his magnum opus. His great work. His final statement to us, and he left us a lot of really great roles that he had chosen. All of them were about conclusions. And this one was all about how much hurt and pain you have to go through as a Black person in this country. And it is profound and gorgeous.*

Stephen builds on Joelle's statements about the performances and how they are "showcases for the actors" and that the "performances are glorious" or that you "can't underestimate the Viola Davis performance." He ended with a statement that he "loves this film" and how the music was woven in. Aisha and Linda build on the movie review style of discussion about the strength of the performances and

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[36] Ma Rainey's Black Bottom, 2020. *Tensions rise when trailblazing blues singer Ma Rainey and her band gather at a recording studio in Chicago in 1927.*

how much they loved the film with more critical review aspects layered in by unpacking how specific

scenes operate for the narrative.

> *Aisha, 7:20*
>
> *I mean I am going to second and third pretty much everything that Joelle and Stephen said. I do think that one of the things that really works for this is having George C. Wolfe at the helm. He is known for creating these types of stories that are really good at dissecting Black American music and the way in which Black American music has been co-opted by the white mainstream. And central to Viola Davis and Chadwick Boseman's characters are that they are struggling to keep their music and keep their voices for themselves. And not have to sell them, or least not give them away for what they think they are worth. And so, there is a great scene where Ma Rainey demands Coca-Cola. And she has already been delaying the recording session for hours. She has been late, and the white manager and the white music producer are like very frustrated already. And she is like, I want my Coca-Cola. And she makes them go off and get it, and she tells the other band members—she is like look, I do this because they think they can control me. And it is not necessarily about the Coca-Cola it is about me getting some control.*

Pop Culture Happy Hour then leverages the technological affordances of podcasts to play the audio of the

scene directly in the episode. Aisha follows up after the audio with further explanation on what that scene

accomplished, "juxtaposing these different tensions between white and Black and the soul of Black music

and the blues of Black music." Linda "echoed the admiration that all of you have. I found it riveting and

loved the performances" (10:45) before building even more.

> *Linda, 13:16*
>
> *I think what Aisha talks about with the story of the Coca-Cola; I think that it reminds me of stories that I have heard Viola Davis tell. It reminds me of stories that I have heard Shonda Rhimes tell. There is wonderful material in here about the difference between people respecting you as a person and people wanting to consume the value of your art. And I very much admired the way this gets at those issues.*

The group spends more time unpacking the importance of Black culture and theater before wrapping up

with the final recommendation for the audience to see the film. This example showed *Pop Culture Happy

Hour* blending a movie review and a critical review. It regularly provided some breakdown of specific

scenes or embedded some audio to show the audience how the scenes operated for the larger story and

why the artistic elements were impactful. It tended to tie the critical and movie review elements to the

hosts' recommendations. This type of conversation provides a framework to understand future audio

critics creating discourse within artistic and critical spaces.

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Returning to the four legacy genres of written criticism, a screening report was observed a small portion of the time. A screening report describes shots and scenes in detail to drive discussions, and they are more associated with film classes than published criticism. I categorized an episode as a screening report when the episode mostly described movie scenes with commentary stemming directly from textual references to the scene. For example, *The Big Picture* completed a rewatch of <u>Tenet</u> when the film was released on VOD. During this conversation, the hosts spent most of the time sharing and describing their favorite scenes from the film rather than pushing the conversation into artistic, socio-political, or thematic territories.

> *Sean Fennessey, December 17, 2020, 25:20, [Link](#)*
>
> *And a lot of the best scenes feel like self-homages. The big McGuffin truck raid where they think they are going to get plutonium, but it is actually a piece of the algorithm, is just a riff on the <u>Dark Knight</u> truck race in the tunnels. You know, like, there are so many of these like the corridor fight in the kitchen and the shoot-out later when they are in Shreveport like that is <u>Inception</u>, like that is the hallway fight in Inception. And the plane diversion, crashing the plane into the building, that is Chris's introduction to his favorite character Bane in the <u>Dark Knight Rises</u>.*

The conversation focused less on explaining the major themes or plot details, like a critical review would do to explain narrative concepts, and far more on the details of moments they enjoyed or stood out.

This genre in legacy criticism behaves more readily as an activity for audio critics at large than an entire purpose of the conversation. Within a classroom context, a screening report can be used to identify several main points with the evidence from the film to help a student prepare for discussions or exam questions (Corrigan, 2015). The screening reports here were not for an exam, obviously, but with podcasts being a discussion-based medium it tracks that many audio critics used rich descriptions of various scenes to drive the conversation about a film forward. Also, the audio medium necessitates the critics to describe scenes to the audience, so we can picture what they are talking about and follow along. As I watched most of the films presented in the sample, I was easily oriented during the discussions thanks to the detailed scene descriptions. And when I had not seen the film, I found the screening report aspects extremely helpful to understand why they were making certain evaluations.

Black Girl Film Club provided the genre of screening report the most frequently. Britney Brinson and Ashley Ayer used rich descriptions of a scene to launch into more theoretical or critical conversation turns to serve their interpretive niche. They leveraged screening reports to ultimately have conversations that were aesthetic or socio-political with each other and by extension the audience. One example was the discussion of Natural Born Killers when the character of Warren Redcloud is murdered by the protagonists. Natural Born Killers is about serial murderers with a screenplay written by Quentin Tarantino. They provide a rich description of the scene as an entry point to violence in our society and graphic violence in media culture.

> *Ashley, November 30, 2020, 70:37, [Link](#)*
>
> *Um, because there is this part too where they like, the word Demons and Too Much TV is on their shirts, which I am like, are you saying it is demonic to watch a lot of television? I guess yes. And um he* [the protagonist] *is having like a terrible dream about his parents and like his mother. His mother is verbally abusive, and his father is abusive to his mother. And so, he wakes up and shoots Warren Redcloud. And I was like, y'll didn't need to include this! Of all the scenes they didn't need to include, I feel like they could have left this one out.*

> *Britney, 71:32*
>
> *One thing about this, so is like this is the only time they feel bad like. They feel sorry like for killing someone.*

The conversation evolved from here into a discussion on violence and remorse. The rich description with commentary set the foundation for the talk on violence.

Screening reports were most used by the storytellers, whose role is in providing the experience of the film back to the listener in nearly complete detail. The conversation example from *Black Girl Film Club*, as storytellers, also goes on to describe additional plot details in order that helped me picture the entire movie. The screening reports were associated with lengthier episodes, reflecting an average of 128 minutes, certainly influenced by the storyteller style of describing most scenes back to the audience to set up the conversation. While I did not see Natural Born Killers, I feel like I have seen this film because of the detail in the screening report.

The last legacy genre, theoretical reviews, accounted for only a small portion of the sample and were associated with types of film. Theoretical reviews consider arguments within the text's structure

related to culture and socio-political production to speak on the relation of film to reality (Corrigan, 2015). The theoretical reviews were typically associated with critical reviews as the podcasters unpacked the nuances in the plotting or details to make the theoretical connections to interpretations and experiences.

Table 13: Data for Theoretical Reviews

CaseID	Text Title	Backing	Niche	Genre 1	Genre 2	Evaluation	Evaluation 2
blkgirlfilmclub	Natural Born Killers (1994)	Crowd-Backed	Interpretive	Screening Report	Theoretical Review	Aesthetic	Socio-Political
blkgirlfilmclub	Her Smell (2018)	Crowd-Backed	Interpretive	Screening Report	Theoretical Review	Socio-Political	Aesthetic
pchh	Coco	Legacy-Backed	Interpretive	Critical Review	Theoretical Review	Socio-Political	Aesthetic
thebigpic	Mank Week: The Importance	Legacy-Backed	Technical	News and Culture Review	Theoretical Review	Industry	Aesthetic
wisecrack	Ferris Bueller's Day Off (Direc	Crowd-Backed	Interpretive	Critical Review	Theoretical Review	Socio-Political	Aesthetic
wisecrack	Soul (Directed by Pete Docto	Crowd-Backed	Interpretive	Critical Review	Theoretical Review	Socio-Political	Entertainment
CaseID	Text Title	Backing	Niche	Genre 1	Genre 2	Evaluation	Evaluation 2
pchh	Small Axe	Legacy-Backed	Interpretive	Theoretical Review	Critical Review	Socio-Political	Industry
wisecrack	Ready Player One (Directed k	Crowd-Backed	Interpretive	Theoretical Review	Critical Review	Socio-Political	Aesthetic

The theoretical reviews were most associated within the interpretive niche of discourse and from audio critics with crowd-backing rather than legacy-backing. Only once did the theoretical review appear as a genre outside of the interpretive niche for discourse: the episode was a mixture of news and culture and discussion of Mank from *The Big Picture*. *The Big Picture* produced a technical niche of discourse and made socio-political arguments both from the text of Mank and the cultural engagement with Mank during the conversation. Otherwise, the interpretative niche of discourse, and most likely the crowd-backed critics, are sites to explore and critique theoretical arguments within our cinematic landscape.
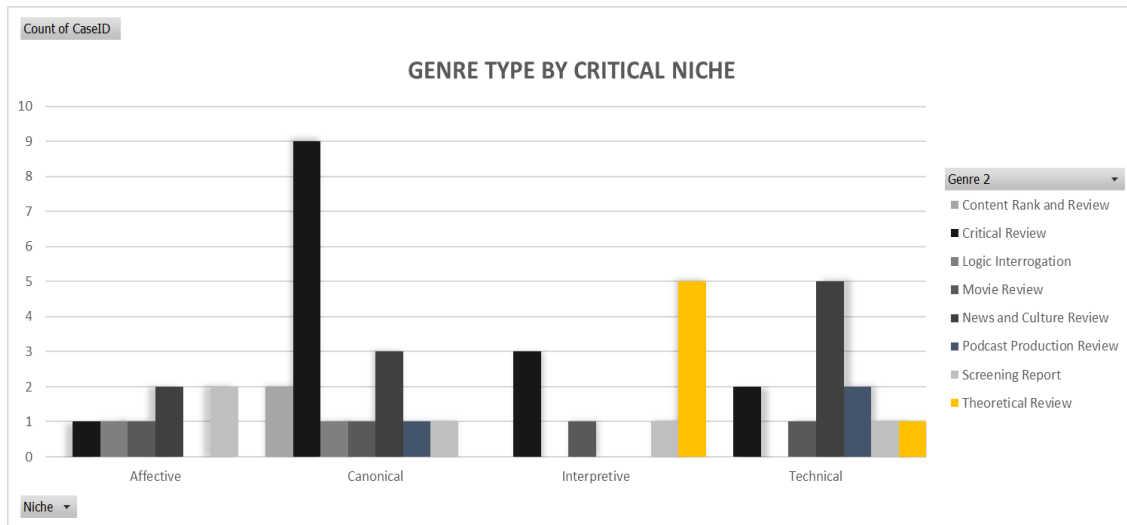
Figure 27: Genre by Niche

Commonly, the arguments surrounding media products reflect opposition to the hegemony being reproduced through the text as films represent a site of discourse within the ideological state apparatus (Althusser, 1998). The arguments may address the persistence of racial and gender stereotyping, of exclusion and erasure, othering, and aspects of our capitalist ethos (Ott & Mack, 2014). If an academic presence appeared within audio critic discourse, the use of feminist, queer, erotic, and critical race critiques may be employed to form the arguments about culture via what is represented on the screen. However, academic training is not necessarily a prerequisite for effective argument formation and media analysis, particularly if that analysis can come from the experiences of the community reflected (Kershaw, 1992/2007). As the hosts of *Black Girl Film Club* claimed when asked why they started their podcast, every day viewers do comprehend the symbolic interaction and messages represented in films and they want to share that perspective with others. Ashley had said, "I know what I felt, I know what I thought, and I know how I interpreted it. I don't need anybody else to tell me" when describing in an interview why she likes to talk about film (CTSJ Events, 2020). The feedback loop between the crowd-backed critics and their audience demonstrated this point where *Black Girl Film Club* received a thoughtful email asking for more conversation and reaction around the racially-coded arguments of Queen & Slim while *Show Me the Meaning* fielded voicemails explaining gender dynamics and feminist arguments to oppose the messages in the James Bond franchise. The theoretical review represents an

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outcome that points back to the culturally and discursively powerful interpretive niche of audio criticism for unpacking arguments and fostering critical thinking form the audience.

The legacy-backed critics tended towards more traditional and market-friendly genres and niches of discourse as influenced by organizational and social institutional pressures. The legacy-backed critics receive cultural capital, legitimacy, and critical authority from their positions within established news organizations. These organizations relay events and information on to the audience while navigating traditional advertising structures. Both the expectation of the organizations and the professional standing of the critics as journalists and editors influence a type of discourse that tends towards canonical and technical niches. The doxa of journalism is to produce information about current events with sincerity, albeit always impacted by bias and framing on the part of the journalist (Schudson, 2011). A value on detachment exists within the journalist profession which presents a tension if attempting to make strong arguments that oppose hegemony, uniformity, and a given culture. Now, the audio critics are cultural journalists, a more flexible off-shoot from the politics and news beats, yet tendency of the legacy-backed audio critics to cover a wider variety of genres and far fewer theoretical reviews compared to the crowd-backed audio critics demonstrates some following of the reporting rather than argument-based doxa for journalists. Often arguments against culture are kept in the opinion columns or comment sections with moderation and gatekeeping on the part of the news organization. On the flip-side, the crowd-backed organizations don't necessarily follow that doxa as they are not part of the journalist profession. Further the audience created around crowd-backed organizations may choose them in the fragmented market for more personalized opinions and arguments. Ultimately, it is more neutral to share information about the artistic qualities of a film or discuss industry and trade implications than dig into ideological arguments that may oppose the traditions of the organization and wider audience share that the legacy-backed critics operate within.
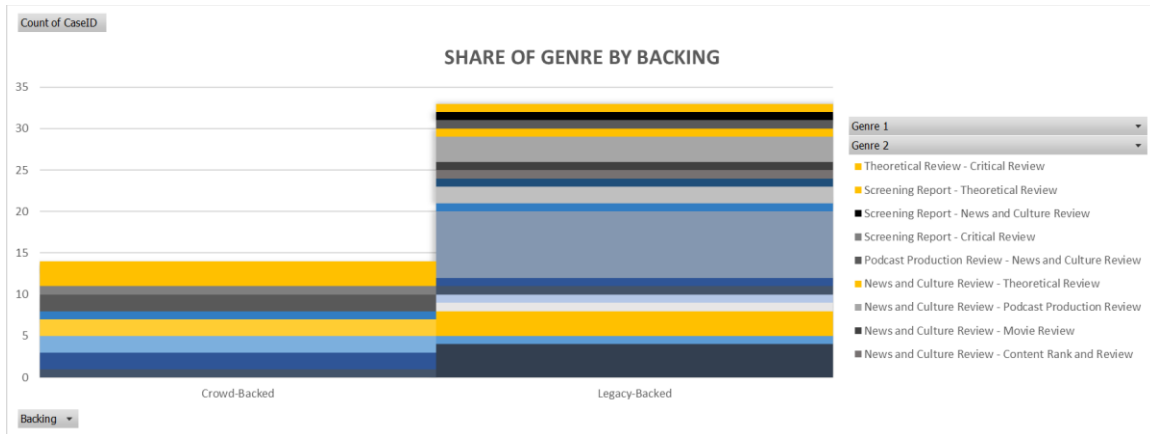
Figure 28: Theoretical Reviews shown in Gold

Both trends present meaningful patterns for future investigation as the interpretive niche holds potential for critical consciousness raising among audiences and the crowd-backed structure embeds more flexibility with less expectation of the journalistic practice. In addition, theoretical reviews were more associated with culturally connected films, and the audio critics may follow a routine of selecting films that have cultural connections if they aim to provide theoretical reviews to the audience. Critics used this genre to unpack texts with racial salience like Small Axe and Soul or films with cultural salience like Citizen Kane and Natural Born Killers. *Show Me the Meaning*, residing in an interpretive niche with an organizational purpose to translate texts to the audience (the influence of Wisecrack's brand), selected films within popular culture to draw out more of the theoretical aspects for the audience such as Ferris Bueller's Day Off and Ready Player One. Research seeking to deeply critique racially or socially focused discourse could turn to the podcasts covering particularly charged movies to argue the extent that consciousness and praxis appear among the communities. Additionally, the modeling of discussion and attention to alternate histories and perspectives holds theoretical power in influencing attitudes and behaviors of the listeners towards increased cultural sensitivity and interest in participation (Nabi & Moyer-Guse, 2012). A potential inverse effect from these types of conversation to explore further, and in mind based on the limited feedback loop presented by the audiences, is slacker activism where the token displays of support through listening to a conversation satisfies the moral needs and limits additional forms of engagement (Glenn, 2015; Lane & Dal Cin, 2018). More research on the audience reception

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would illuminate if the theoretical reviews promoted more cultural participation and awareness or less extended outcomes and practice among listeners.

Show Me the Meaning most frequently reviewed films through a theoretical review style as it unpacked socio-politically driven themes for the audience. The content exists in the interpretive niche and their organizational affiliation, Wisecrack, serves philosophically-based content on YouTube and podcasts to a wide audience. Its model sets an example for theoretical review that can be compared to a larger sample to understand how socially-minded discourse about films circulate.

Almost every episode of *Show Me the Meaning* began with a detailed synopsis or recap of the film to build a foundation for the conversation. The group then selected one or two central themes to discuss and unpack. Austin, the main host and facilitator, would guide conversation from theme to theme, asking the hosts to expand when needed. The themes from previous episodes would often appear in the Mailbag segment as the engaged audience called or emailed in to expand on the thoughts. *Show Me the Meaning* used the detailed recap and screening reports to generate arguments for the theoretical discussion in highly academic and sophisticated ways. The themes were typically discussed through a socio-cultural lens, which relates to the sociology and philosophy backgrounds the Wisecrack organization was couched within. *The Show Me the Meaning* model for theoretical review also allots at least five to ten minutes for each theme analysis. Again, it reminded me the most of a classroom with 50-minute episodes that devoted even time for the group to unpack a few central themes: not unlike my classroom experiences in undergraduate film courses.

A salient example of its method compared to other audio critics is the discussion of <u>Soul</u>. The episode on <u>Soul</u> unpacked themes of Black coolness and Black influence on American music, art, and culture. This segment exemplifies the theoretical review genre and reflects the routine *Show Me the Meaning* followed in most of the episodes. Its discussion of <u>Soul</u> also resonated with me as the most socially aware conversation compared to the other critics who covered <u>Soul</u> in the sample.

Austin, January 22, 2021, 14:24, Link

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Here is the interesting thing. There is a universal message, right, about soul and purpose and finding your meaning and falling in love with life. And then there is another thing that I think essentially makes this a Black film. And what I mean by that is that this film celebrates something that is essentially a gift and creation of the Black American community in the form of jazz music that has shaped American society and shaped American culture in a very profound way. So, all of the stuff that is universal it starts from that particular standpoint. So, finding your soul and being in the flow state and having soul, that is a universal thing. But there is also something really wonderful to celebrate about how influential jazz music is. And I love how the father at one point says, 'No it is Black improvisational music.' So, I think there is an intentional sense in which they are trying to say: no, no something really important to understand about this creative contribution constructing the edifice of American art that is due particularly to a particular view of being human. And the human is something derived from the Black experience. So, it is universal but also essentially particular at the same time.

The conversation transitioned after a few minutes on the Black coolness and jazz into a philosophical discussion on art, passion, and security more generally. The points that Austin and his co-hosts discussed center theory, literature, and historical experiences of Black communities. An effective interdisciplinary approach and normalizing of alternate experiences and histories requires close attention to recognizing, centering, educating, and valuing the lives of marginalized groups (Kershaw, 1992/2007). Much of the *Show Me the Meaning* discourse comes from a philosophical perspective and the intention to bring in aspects of Black Theory and Scholarship points towards an interdisciplinary movement that can and should be expanded with benefit and potential towards praxis couched in communal engagement and education. While my goal in this research was not to evaluate how correct or good the critics were, *Show Me the Meaning* continuously struck me with its thoughtfulness and connection to theory.

While it did not fully unpack the theory driving the thoughts, the discussion acknowledged a tendency to view Black experiences through a lens of white supremacy that minimizes or co-opts the significance and contributions of the communities (Du Bois, 1903; hooks, 1992; Harris-Perry, 2011). Running through most historical representations of Black people in media is the misrecognition of Blackness. Misrecognition contributes to the perceptions of Blackness as problematic to American life (Allen, 2003) and the reduces the ability of Black people to be understood through racial histories without being reduced to white images of Blackness (Harris-Perry, 2011). American ideals of co-opting cultures and imagery into the mainstream while distorting the original creators contribute to the misrecognition. Austin directly challenges that misrecognition by opening a conversation with his co-hosts and the

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audience about the "human-derived from the Black experience" and how Black communities and creative perspectives have contributed to the heart of American culture. *Show Me the Meaning*—a group of primarily white-passing men—provide a challenge by examining the system of unrecognized appropriation of cultures. More importantly, it offers that challenge to a community of engaged listeners at least 2,000 strong based on the views for the Soul podcast stream. Audio critics with interpretive niches and the ability to provide theoretical reviews could impact the discourse and deserve more rhetorical analysis of the work they provide.

Looking more closely at Soul, which three of the five critics covered, *Show Me the Meaning's* 10-minute discussion on Black cultural contributions was the most in-depth provided. *The Big Picture* focused its conversation on the affect of the film and barely acknowledged the racial moment happening before them. And *Pop Culture Happy Hour* received backlash from its community on the treatment of race in their discussion because they largely avoided the conversation. Similar to the Wonder Woman 1984 comparison in Chapter 3, each critic facilitates their community niche with very different core conversations about the same film. *Pop Culture Happy Hour* spent more time with impressions on the performance and design than cultural themes; *Show Me the Meaning* unpacked several themes for Black influences, affirmations, security, and what is Truth in reality; and *The Big Picture* split its conversation between coping with life's experiences and the production leadership at Pixar.

The Big Picture spent half of the episode on December 31, 2020, discussing Soul with nearly 20 minutes dedicated to unpacking the themes of the movie through a lens of how we cope with life's disappointments and how we become aware of our emotions with emphasis on how watching the story felt. The conversation was socio-political in evaluation: sociopolitical tied more closely to the workplace and life relationship in society.

> *Amanda, December 31, 2020, 51:45, [Link](#)*
>
> *Once again, Pete Docter's representation of the workplace, A+. But he defines that Joe takes away from the orientation that it is about your purpose. And it is kind of like your passion and the thing that you are meant to do in life. So, they spend all the movie searching for 22's like spark. And the reveal is that 22's, her passion, her spark, is not a thing but being ready to live. Like being able to appreciate life.*

After Sean Fennessey and Amanda Dobbins shared the theme of life's meaning, they moved into a

primary discussion on the production leadership of Pixar. It was within the conversation on cultural

production where race was acknowledged by Sean.

> *61:09*
>
> *This is the biggest media conglomerate in the world making a movie about the nature of existence…that is animated. It also is a story that is co-written and co-directed by a Black man, whose main character is a Black man. And it is also about Jazz. This is uncommon. Like Pixar is also changing. Pete Docter has taken over as the Chief Creative Officer of the company. He is not just the director of <u>Monsters INC</u> and <u>Up</u> and <u>Inside Out</u>. He is also basically the person who helps guide every project in some way. He is the story advisor on all their films, and he very wisely brought Kemp Powers into this movie. And you see Pixar in the way the world is trying to change and evolve and understand and become more diverse. And think beyond perspectives that are in their own limited spaces into a wider world. And you could tell Pete Docter has been working on this movie for a couple of years. And they are not getting it right and they needed a new voice to help them figure out who Joe is and what one of the purposes of this movie is. So, they call Kemp Powers, the same way that they brought in Adrian Molina to work with Lee Unkrich on <u>Coco</u>, and it changes the movie completely. You get a completely different kind of a story that also kids are going to get to see. And they are going to get to see Joe play jazz music on stage, which something a lot of kids are not going to get a chance to see because that is not an art form, we prize in our culture right now. And it is a great thing.*

The potentially rich conversation between Sean and Amanda on the actual significance of Jazz and their

interaction with a Black experience and perspective was left hanging in the air, unsaid. Instead, they

approached cultural considerations through the more general lens of an art form that "a lot of kids are not

going to get a chance to see" without really exploring why it is not seen. Based on the patterns from *The

Big Picture*, the niche is not a critical space imagined for deep racial, socio-economic, and political

discussion: unless it is the politics of movie making. The technical niche centers issues of Hollywood,

thus the conversation is about the new creative directions at Pixar, rather than issues of lived cultural or

political experiences.

On the other hand, *Pop Culture Happy Hour* consistently describes and evaluates the art forms

with socio-political contexts present. Earlier in the sample it hosted conversations about <u>Ma Rainey's

Black Bottom</u> with direct statements on racial tensions and the lack of respect Black women in

entertainment often receive (December 17, 2020). It also spent an entire episode providing historical and

social context for the audience to better appreciate and understand <u>Small Axe</u> (December 16, 2020), and

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further it openly talked about Asian American stereotypes with guests on <u>Scott Pilgrim vs. the World</u> (December 6, 2020). The feedback loop on *Pop Culture Happy Hour* reflects an audience interested in stronger centering of the experiences and histories of the communities represented in the films. That reflection and active centering of experience is needed to bring theory and praxis together to form stronger activism and criticism of current systems and ideological representations (Kershaw, 1992/2007). On Twitter, the episode for <u>Small Axe</u> received higher than usual retweets and likes, which are indicators of the cultural goodwill and interest of the audience in promoting and endorsing that type of discourse. I came to expect at least a little unpacking and discussion from each episode, and it appears the audience expects sophistication and acknowledgment in the discussion of race and culture related to films as well. The feedback loop in response to the <u>Soul</u> episode was embedded with critical discourse of the way race was de-emphasized in a movie centered on the experience of a Black man embedded within jazz culture as a Black historical and cultural contribution to art. At a briefer 16 minutes, <u>Pop Culture Happy Hour</u> talked more about the technical aspects of the score, the art design, and the performances than the impact of Pixar's first Black man as the lead protagonist and the influence of Black cultures in the mainstream consciousness. Instead, the conversation is laced with coded language, a way to contain racialized discourse and avoid reactions (Omi & Winant, 2015), such as the "Pixar aesthetic" when trying to explain why Joe, the main Black man, didn't connect with the viewer. It stuck closely to the aesthetic point of view and canonical practices for artistic critique over cultural connections. When it did discuss the central musical theme, an entry point where *Show Me the Meaning* and *The Big Picture* entered more racially centered conversation, the group went in a different direction.

> *Stephen Thompson, 12:23, Link*
> *I am very glad, Linda, that you mentioned the music. Not only do you have those gorgeous Jon Batiste performances [*they insert a snippet of a piano piece from the film*] but you have the score in the other realms that is crafted by Trent Reznor and Atticus Ross as their most menacing. I just think, man, there is so much grit and care and thought put into so many components of this film.*

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Aisha Harris then followed up with comparisons to the <u>Coco</u> and the <u>Good Place</u> that "handles the after-life and all of the existential questions so well that here it just doesn't coalesce, to me, in the same way" (14:15).

Glen Weldon, 14:28

Right. And even if the story doesn't land with you the skill in the animation is worth the price of a ticket. I hate saying that but here you go. What Pixar and Disney have understood, and what filmmakers like Robert Zemeckis should understand, which is that you don't need to cross the uncanny valley. Stay on this side of the uncanny valley. And create caricatures but animate the hell out of them. Your brain will just make you forget that you are watching an animated film at passages. [Linda interjects You will believe]. Yes, you will believe that this man can play jazz.

Linda Holmes, 14:59

Yeah. I think Stephen is exactly right that it doesn't speak poorly of a movie that it is not as good as <u>Inside Out</u>, necessarily. But I was also thinking while I was watching this that it is hard to unite, for me, the Pixar aesthetic with an adult main character. Rather than an animal or beasty or child. While I think is part of why, as Aisha mentioned, you do have little blobs for part of it. But I don't think that their aesthetic or their playfulness or their sense of physical comedy works quiet as well for me with an adult main character. It is not as easy to make that whimsy work. And again, there is not a reason in the world not to check it out. I think kids will enjoy it. I think the little soul blob, the Tina Fey soul blob is very cute. And despite the misgivings that Aisha talked about, that I think are partly about that, I enjoyed that part. It was fine. [Stephen interjects, it is better than fine!]. And Stephen thinks it is better than fine. Well, we want to know what you think about Soul...

Linda then signs off the episode by inviting the audience to tweet and comment on Facebook. Her attempt to minimize the racial discourse at play with aesthetic values and justifying the need for soul blobs over [Black] human forms lends itself to anti-racialism while functioning to move the conversation on and away from race all together. The episode was far more about the art and score than jazz music as a cultural concept. The group also explicitly dismissed Aisha's attempt to discuss race, which Linda referred to in the end as "it was fine." Earlier, Aisha had shared an aspect that made her uncomfortable, which the group did not expand or build on:

5:57

There is also this weird thing that happens. And there were some critiques from people who had not seen the movie at all starting as early as last year, about the fact that this is a film with the first Black Pixar protagonist and for the majority of its people thought that he was going to be a blue blob. And it was in the same vein as The Princess and the Frog where she is a frog for most of the movie and we don't actually see a Black human. It is more complicated than that, I will say, but the way they seemed to play it [race] left me a little uncomfortable. I wish

that I could talk about it, but it might be too spoiler-y. But it was just a little weird and jarring to me. But I wanted to love this more than I did. And unfortunately, I did not love it.

Linda, 6:40
Yeah. How about you Glen?

Glen, 6:41
Well, I loved everything about this….

Aisha is speaking about the body-swapping between Joe (played by Jamie Foxx) and 22 (Tina Fey), which placed a white voice and talent into the visual Black body for much of the movie. Aisha also references the pattern of Black characters being presented as something other than a Black body in Disney works such as The Princess and the Frog, with Tiana being a frog for most of the visuals. The hosts continued with the round of impressions, per the routine, yet none of the other hosts engaged with Aisha's statement where they typically acknowledge and build on each other more. Typically, the hosts build more on what each one says, and the idea of Black representation in, as Aisha mentioned, the first Black-led Pixar movie was largely skipped over. Glen went on to talk about the animation design, music, and our "culture of seminars, and slide decks, and TedTalks." The colorblind approach to this film, particularly in contrast with the willingness to acknowledge, engage, and center the experiences of typically Othered groups, did not go un-noticed by the community. The Twitter and Facebook posts about Soul heavily featured comments about the lack of salience race was afforded in the episode and the treatment of Aisha's perspectives by her colleagues.

Figure 29 Twitter responses from audiences that Aisha's perspective on race was diminished.
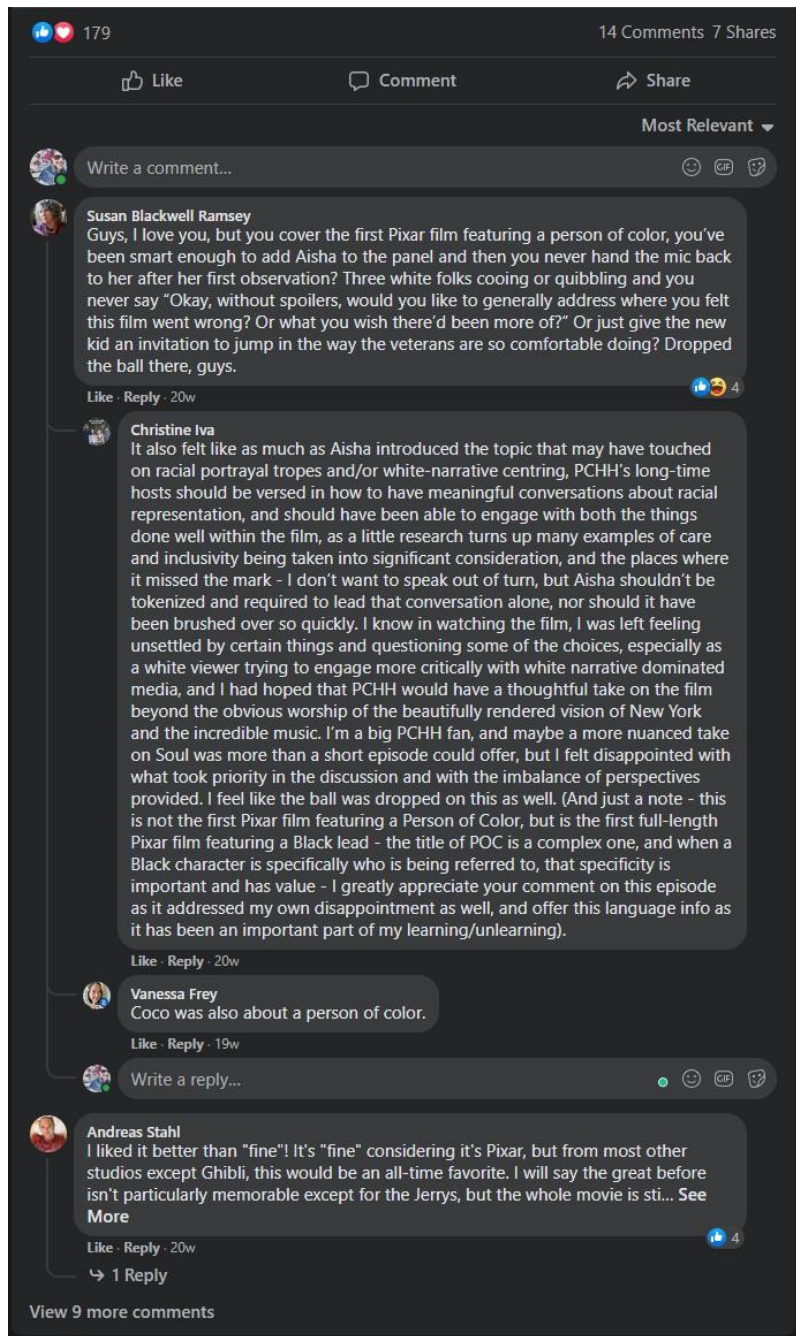
Figure 30: Reactions to PCHH's handling of race from the Facebook community.

On Twitter, more than half of the comment thread mentioned Aisha or a desire for more robust

conversation on the role and context of Blackness in the film. And Facebook featured several nuanced

commentaries to the treatment of race in the discussion and the lack of expectations met. The community

used terms like "gaslit", "unbalanced", and "diminished" to describe the treatment that race was given in

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the discourse after Aisha Harris attempted to bring up the subject to her colleagues. She did offer several potential entry points, from naming the photos of jazz legends Nina Simone and Duke Ellington in the set design to applauding the Afro on Dorothea. Yet, none of those topics were used to frame a more racially thoughtful discussion. The thought that seemed to catch the ears of the community and was a moment referenced in the comment threads was her acknowledgment that "the way they seemed to play it [race] left me a little uncomfortable. I wish that I could talk about it, but it might be too spoiler-y." When Linda did return Aisha's comments in the final wrap up of the episode, there was an air of dismissal in the tone that the community comments seem to be drawing from: *And despite the misgivings that Aisha talked about, and I think are partly about that* [the little blue soul blobs], *I enjoyed that part. It was fine.* Linda's words and tone do function to dismiss the part that made Aisha, a Black woman, uncomfortable as something that the white hosts "enjoyed" and thought "was fine." The dismissal of Aisha's concerns resonates with the sentiment of *Black Girl Film Club* creators Ashley and Britney who recognized that white critics often lacked the cultural and lived experience to understand and read the nuance and problems in films with Black cultural aspects. Having Jaime Fox voice a blue blob and a cat for most of the movie may be fine to those outside of the lived experience of feeling the cultural appropriation and erasure of histories and works: a Black body was still on the screen as a main character on the surface-level. But in positioning the discourse as "fine" with Black characters being played by non-Black actors (Tina Fey) harkens back to the justification for minstrel and segregation from arts and theaters when the representation of Black experiences was not valued enough to warrant meaningful and accurate performances (Bogle, 2010). *Pop Culture Happy Hour*, as a well-known and widely received conduit to cultural discussion, is pushing the collective memory around Black exclusion and appropriation in film by not engaging in a legitimate oppositional reading to racial aspect of <u>Soul</u>.

When tagged on Twitter, Aisha provided the community an expanded response; however, the *Pop Culture Happy Hour* brand did not respond or react to any of the commentary that I could find. Aisha's personal thread generated a lot of engagement: 20 replies (above the *PCHH* average, 6), 66 retweets (below the *PCHH* average, 177), and over 900 likes (above the *PCHH* average, 780).

Figure 31 Aisha Harris responds to Tweets with more on her perspective to the use of race in Soul.

In the threads, Aisha's community varied between short sentiment agreements, scene call-outs, and at least one counter-point discussion about the overall casting of the movie (predominantly Black actors playing Black human characters in the background) and the importance of the lead actor not being a Black man for entire second act. Aisha's comment threads were consistent with the pattern of communities to engage more with the individual hosts rather than the audio critic channels. And I did not come across other hosts prompting a discussion with race as the salient topic on their personal threads. Overall, the canonical niche that *Pop Culture Happy Hour* facilitates does include thoughtfulness towards cultural aspects inherent to the film under review. While *Pop Culture Happy Hour* often delivers that balance to the audience, it missed the mark with Soul and the audience was vocal in calling out the behavior.

The comparison of Soul across three audio critics also illuminated a limitation for the theoretical genre for audio criticism. Despite having the technological affordance to produce lengthy and in-depth educational discussions on socio-political contexts for themes, the routines of the critics did not often engage in a wider dialogue with the audience much. Most of the conversations on race, as a salient socio-political issue in 2020, were limited to an acknowledgment with little expansion. Even *Black Girl Film*

Club, whose interpretive niche and storyteller style lend to an opportunity for depth, I did not observe that routine. With a much larger sample set of interpretive and canonical niche critics like *Black Girl Film Club*, *Show Me the Meaning*, and *Pop Culture Happy Hour* more insight and robust theory could be applied to the potential of audio critics to foster critical consciousness and cultural competencies among the audience. The ability for interpretive discourse seems to rest more-so in the content of the crowd-backed critics who engage and value the audience as agents in discourse rather than observers of a conversation.

In summary: the five audio critics sampled in this study did follow legacy routines of criticism by delivering recognizable genres of movie reviews with recommendations, critical reviews of the artistic mechanics and messages, screening reports to describe scenes to build conversation, and theoretical reviews to contextualize films within culture. At the core, audio critics are film critics when defining their practices through the literature of how we typically write about film (Corrigan, 2015), what types of evaluations tend to come from our Schools of Criticism (McWhirter, 2016), and the underlying point of a critic to articulate evaluations and meaning in films (Frey, 2015). As the audio critics performed recognizable actions and genres, they also demonstrated activity not well-covered in the literature on written and traditional criticism. The next section explores the emergent genres the critics deployed in their reviews and speaks to the expanded role and purpose of film criticism in the audio and new media space.

4.1.1 Genres within Audio Criticism

The audio critics produced recognizable genres from legacy routines for writing about evaluating films while expanding into four additional event types in their aural discourses. Four genres of episode emerged from the sample and can be studied across a larger project with more audio critics to determine how prevalent they are to the subfield. I observed rank and review, news/culture review, logic interrogation, and podcast production reviews with enough frequency and consistency of the activity to add them to the codebook. Some genres were most closely associated with niches such as the logic interrogation and the affective niche that centers the experience of a text. *Mostly Nitpicking*, whose

community seeks to "pick apart a piece of pop culture by looking exclusively at the details" represented the most logic interrogations of the storytelling. And some genres are more associated with time of the year, for example the podcast production review, which most critics completed as 2020 closed.

Table 14: Genre and Definitions

Event Type (Genre)	grouping of discursive interactions within social event
Screening Report	descriptions of shots and scenes to drive the primary discussions
Movie Review	summaries of plot and context with recommendations for audience
Theoretical Review	arguments about cinematic representation to explain complex socio-political structures
Critical Review	deconstruction of narrative and production choices to reveal nuance in cinematic storytelling
Logic Interrogation	interrogation of the internal logic structures and continuity in cinematic storytelling
News and Culture Review	providing updates and context on current events related to art and industry
Podcast Production Review	reflecting on the content and state of the podcast
Content Rank and Review	ranking sets of similar content or texts

The rank and review genre of audio criticism ranks sets of similar content, such as the top films of 2020 or an actor's filmography within a single episode or conversation. While aspects of a movie review or critical review are present and often secondary genres, the primary structure of a rank and review podcast is to spend a few minutes on many texts to summarize and contextualize the field of that film. The rank and review is distinct from the more typical and legacy practice of dedicating most of the episode/article to a single film. This style of content lends itself to non-film episodes from *Pop Culture Happy Hour* such as the Best Books of 2020 (December 13, 2020) or talking about songs on a particular artists' albums. *The Big Picture* also used this style often as opportunities to discuss an actor or director's filmography.

When *The Big Picture* discussed the George Clooney Hall of Fame (December 23, 2020) it ranked the top 10 Clooney movies in just over an hour, dedicating six to eight minutes per film for

summary and review. It also tied the episode to Twitter and asked the audience to rank their own George

Clooney lists.

Figure 32 Tweet of the Clooney Hall of Fame after a Rank and Review episode.

Six minutes compared to the 51-minute average of a single movie review podcast demonstrates the need

for a new category to describe the goal of the rank and review. *The Big Picture* demonstrated a similar

routine two additional times when it ranked the Top Movies of 2020 (December 8, 2020) and provided a

1995 Movie Draft (December 29, 2020) where it selected the top movies of that year. This category was

only observed within the traditional style of film review as storytellers, by definition, dedicate lengthy

periods of time to a single text that allows the audience to experience the story. A Rank and Review

would undermine that style; however *Mostly Nitpicking* would dabble in the practice by ranking all the

DC Villains by badness, for example, as part of the Wonder Woman 1984 episode. A rank and review

was not the primary genre of the conversation, though. Audio critics who use a Rank and Review style

could be studied more closely and across mediums or industries to give researchers snapshots of larger

discourses connected to the overarching topic.[37] A short project with rhetorical analysis of the conversation from *The Big Picture* on the 1995 Movie Draft would offer insight into the collective memory we hold for that year and the films produced. Additionally, future research can look back on the various Top Performances and Top Movies of 2020 to reflect on our experiences and future collective memory of the COVID-19 time. The framework of collective memory and interpretations within a snapshot of a rank and review episode holds significant research promise (Carlson & Berkowitz, 2011).

The next genre also holds some potential for collective memory work and reflects a similar type of genre. The news and culture review provides updates on current events related to art and culture and emerged because audio critics frequently talk about content other than films. Hanitzsch and Vos (2016) identify nuanced roles for journalism in society, particularly for the interpretation between political and everyday life, that is useful in unpacking why audio critics imagine the audiences to want cultural news discussions. The film critic and the news journalist hold parallel roles as informational-instructive—the packing of information—and the analytical-deliberative to engage citizens in public conversations (Hanitzsch & Vos, 2016, p. 8-9). The critics most closely aligned with journalism, *Pop Culture Happy Hour* and *The Big Picture*, tended to provide more news and culture episodes.

The Big Picture appears to integrate news and culture reviews more robustly into the regular content schedule with discussions about movie theaters given COVID-19 and Hollywood updates. The emphasis on production news from *The Big Picture* contributes to its status within a technical niche that imagines the audience to find trade-focused content most valuable. News and Culture was not exclusive to any one niche, however. While entire episodes were not dedicated to the practice, *Mostly Nitpicking* with hosts who work in media news and publishing, often dedicated a segment to culture news. For example, when the Warner Bros and HBO deal was announced, it spent nearly 10 minutes total talk about the event.

>   *Nando, December 15, 2020, 1:18, [Link](#)*

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[37] Note: the Rank and Review style was observed in the newsletter from Linda Holmes of *Pop Culture Happy Hour*. While Rank and Review is not prevalent as a genre of film criticism, film and culture critics have offered lists of different media forms for their readers to quickly engage with several recommendations at once.

On Thursday some news, news very important to us, for various reasons. But um as I am sure everybody knows, Warner Brothers has decided to put all of their 2021 release schedule on HBO Max and in theaters at the same time as part of their, you know, mad rush to get some of these movies out that they have already finished. And that is interesting, so, let's talk about it.

Diggins
There is nothing like a freezing cold take.

Nando
Well, I think we have some interesting perspectives and I think this will bring up another fantastic Mostly Nitpicking audience segment that I feel okay with.

Mostly Nitpicking went on to explain what HBO Max is and how to access the platform. It did diverge into a discussion of the PlayStation 5 Console, which is consistent with the style of informal and diverging conversation flow, before running through the entire line up of HBO Max movies to be released.

The integration of current events and films speaks to the related routines of film critics, cultural journalists, and news. It also speaks to the ability of audio critics, without the length constraints of written work, to expand their conversations beyond the legacy routines of singular film reviews or critiques. The audience for audio critics seems to approve of the interjection of news and culture content around films because the audio critics continue making content with growing listenership, as observed through Twitter followers and overall positive reviews on Apple Podcasts. *The Big Picture*, *Pop Culture Happy Hour*, and *Mostly Nitpicking* each have over four-star ratings, and each integrates news and culture. The other critics also have four-star ratings, signaling they imagine their audience in ways that align with their listeners.

The audience niches reflect key constructions for the audio critics to imagine accurately, and the next genre that emerged relies on an audience niche that is inside the joke. The logic interrogation category is my favorite discovery and is an entertaining way to approach criticism. The genre questions and critically reviews the internal logic structures and continuity within the film or text. The audio critics might point out that a plot device is inconsistent with character motivations, that a fight scene defies physics, or that a set design has a flaw in the environment. Logic interrogation is what you think it is— and it is a fun process of reading a text so closely all the details meant to disappear into the experience

appear as the central conversation lens. The critics are communicating the things they noticed, questions they asked of the plot, and highlights of their time with the film for the audience.

Mostly Nitpicking, as its name foreshadows, was the primary critic to serve logic interrogations in the sample. The typical patterns of conversation were visualized with a lot of white bars that indicate the general topics and turns in the discourse. For *Mostly Nitpicking*, the topics typically looked like interrogating the validity of the film's premise, picking at the details in specific scenes, and talk about a lot about character decisions. This critic uses the storyteller style of review, which means they spend a lot of time describing each narrative beat back to the audience. The roast of the <u>Christmas Chronicle 2</u> (December 15, 2020) included over 20 minutes on the interrogation of just the premise and another 30+ minutes moving scene by scene presenting their questions about the text.

When it interrogated the logic of the film, it was typically filled with sarcastic comments and laughter from the group. But, over the course of this sample I consistently found a fondness and perceived affection from the hosts for the movies and their work. The roasts didn't come across as mean spirited but more lighthearted. For example, in <u>Wonder Woman 1984</u>, the group asked questions about Diana's not so secret identity.

> *Nando, December 29, 2020, 166:02, [Link](#)*
> *What is her [Cheetah] whole deal? Like a lot of the Cheetah stuff went over my head because I couldn't really buy into the character. But like, what did you think of her?*
>
> *DJ, December 29, 2020, 166:22*
> *It's fine. She is wearing her cheetah print outfit because she is like, yeah branding! And she is like "I need to keep Maxwell Lord alive because he is an asset to ensure I get to be like this forever? I guess that is her motivation. So that just ensues, and she is kicking Diana's ass. She knows that is Diana, right? She is like, yeah, my friend!*
>
> *Nando*
> *Diana doesn't have a secret identity. But no-one knows that Wonder Woman exists.*
>
> *Diggins*
> *Yeah, I guess. She makes no effort to hide, yeah.*
>
> *DJ*
> *Well, she does, you know break up security cameras when she gets the chance.*

Diggins

But I mean she makes no effort to discuss herself from anyone who physically sees her. If anyone who sees her just happens to know her in her personal life, they are just going to know. And there is nothing she does to prevent that.

Nando

Even if you heard her from across the room you would be like "Oh there's that woman from work. The woman with the accent that is kind of all over the place. You know. That's her!"

Diggins

Yeah, the woman with the Israeli accent but we all just agree to pretend it is Greek.

And the bit about different accents continues before morphing into the scenes where the movie lost the group between fits of laughter from the hosts. They then get back to the original topic of Cheetah's character, fight styles, and flaws. The style of interrogation allows thoughts to weave in and out of the discussion with loose threads of connection yet listening to the whole episode provides a through line that I could grasp. And the episodes tend to have a genuine appreciation and love for the experience the three hosts went through, both in watching the movie and in retelling the story to each other and the audience.

While *Mostly Nitpicking* built its brand on logic interrogations, every critic in the sample demonstrated qualities of logic interrogation as it roasted some films. As compared in Chapter 3.6 for the influence of organizational differences, Wonder Woman 1984 was covered in overall different ways by each critic who produced an episode on the topic. While they approached their review of the film through different lenses overall, the four critics who covered this film engaged in levels of roasting. *Pop Culture Happy Hour* offered a logic interrogation of Wonder Woman 1984, though second to the stronger genre of a traditional movie review, because it had several conversations along the lines of Linda and Stephen's questions about the internal logic of the plot devices and character motivations.

Linda, December 23, 2020, 15:20, Link
I am not trying to be the person who like, "Well why can ET fly? That makes no sense," like I am not trying to be that person. It is the internal logic of this wishing rock thing that I had trouble with. Stephen what do you think?

Stephen, 15:35

Yeah, that is the thing. I don't think this movie holds to its internal logic. I think that is where I step out of plot and am thinking "well that wouldn't work at all!" and it is like I said, that is a ridiculous thing to think. But there is not that consistency there or consistency across the motivation of the characters.

Each of the hosts had a turn and took the opportunity to point out moments where something doesn't make sense or work within the narrative logic of the film. The style of roasting and logic interrogation in this conversation was still grounded in the narrative form and founded in the issues for character development or set design, true to the canonical niche that *Pop Culture Happy Hour* facilitates. *The Big Picture's* Sean and Amanda also questioned the character motivations and world-building in their review.

Sean, December 25, 2020, 22:09, [Link](#)

Does anybody know that Wonder Woman exists? Are people taking photos of her? Is she famous? Like she looks just like Diana.

Amanda, 22:16

I am really glad you brought this up. During the mall sequence my first thought was like, I need Wonder Woman to be doing more. Like this is beneath her. Like I am glad that she is busting this up. And within five seconds you know that there is a jewelry store, and they are getting something valuable that will become the McGuffin. But Diana does not see that. It seems like she was just at the food court getting an Orange Julius and was like now I need to bust this up.

The Big Picture continued this conversation with questions about how the world doesn't know how Wonder Woman is among the people and the general plot holes of her living situation in Washington D.C. The style of roasting was concentrated on scenes and once they seemed to get it out of the system, the episode reflected closer to the norm of discussion. *The Big Picture* did spend most of the episode providing production-centered context such as the culture of the genre today and predicting the future of the franchise for production and audience reception. *Show Me the Meaning* went further in the logic interrogation by focusing more of its episode on "opening the floodgates" for questions the hosts had while watching the movie.

Austin, January 15, 2021, 15:13, [Link](#)

Now let us get into some analysis of <u>Wonder Woman 1984</u>. First thing, I am not even going to lob a question out there. Amanda, I am just going to open the flood gates up and say, "please pass through with all of your knowledge and your wisdom." What do you have to share?

Amanda

I feel like I am just going to obsess with the same thing that you brought up, which is Chris Pratt… [is corrected by Austin that the actor is Chris Pine] … Chris Pine is in this guy's body. Where did this guy go? Is he in like a white man's sunken place? Is like is he just on a vacation. It is existentially concerning. It also raises a lot of issues about consent. It is very very bizarre. And like the problem is that Diana is supposed to be this harbinger of reality and the best person ever. And she is telling the whole world she needs to be better, yet she is like "okay this guy's body and mind/soul is on vacation and this body is now my boyfriend." And a big part of the video, spoilers, is that I think what could have been more interesting is that her boyfriend could have come back to life but that would mean resigning some other man to like a weird soul underworld for a while and that would be on her. That might be a more interesting conflict. But instead, they are like, "we aren't going to deal with this." It is just so weird.

Raymond

Yeah, it is also weird that this wishing stone could like manifest a wall in the middle of the desert. Like you could just have Chris Pine come back. You don't need to have… like when a guy picks up the wishing stone and wishes for a coffee a person magically shows up with a coffee. They don't cut to someone else that goes where did my coffee go?

The style of interrogation is still grounded in some socio-political and philosophical aspects which speaks to the interpretive niche. The time it spent roasting the film's logic focused more on picking at the tensions in morality presented and issues within the screenplay that caused questions for how characters would act or respond. The logic interrogation may be somewhat inevitable for audio critics because long enough conversations may lead to questions about the structures within a narrative. But for some audio critics, the entire purpose of a conversation revolves around the questions. Future research on how prevalent and what deeper value logic interrogations serve in the discourse would be a fun and fruitful project. YouTube channels like CinemaSins (9.4 Million subscribers) and Screen Junkies (6.77 Million) have built communities of millions around interrogating the logic of films: nitpicking for plot holes and inconsistencies must serve a purpose for the audience ripe for analyses and interrogation.

The final category to emerge was that of the podcast review as audio critics took time to reflect on the content and state of their podcast. This occurred due to the sampling period at the end of the calendar year. These podcasts tended to have very little to do with a film review and more about setting up expectations for the next year, reflecting on their work, and producing that episode that didn't rely on a new movie. The podcast review was helpful in hearing a snapshot of how the hosts perceive their shows and place. A future study, focused on archived podcast reviews over several years, could map how

particular cases evolve over time to predict industry trends and assess up and coming shows. A study focused solely on the persona of podcasters could similarly use the podcast review episodes to deeply dissect the perception of the show to the creator.

Patterns of genre events that reflect and expand legacy behaviors for film criticism readily appeared within and across the sample. The audio critics served their audiences with familiar genres like the movie review and the critical review while also establishing newer opportunities like the rank and review or offering news coverage. Overall, audio critics are easily recognized as film critics with a twist that aligns to their medium and technological affordances of the audio space. The critics produced longer conversations than traditional written criticism might expect to be consumed, and the audio critics were able to cover many topics. Within their genre events of film criticism, each approached the film review through its community niche from more interpretive theoretical or critical reviews to affective communities focused on logic interrogations. The consistency and recognizable discursive events also provide a framework to consider audio critics as a subfield to criticism. The next section responds to that question by unpacking which discursive activities were consistent across the sample and point towards an emerging habitus for the field as audio criticism continues to formalize.

4.2 Which discursive activities form a habitus for audio criticism as a field of practice?

Within production systems, the patterns of workers in a field of practice show the ideologies—the habitus— of the institution (Bourdieu, 1980). This study mapped the discursive activities of audio critics, and I found patterns of behavior within the production system that demonstrate a forming habitus and indicate audio critics belong to a field of practice. Not only did the audio critics follow recognizable standards for the genre events their episodes created (the movie review, the rank and review, etc.), they also follow recognizable and consistent activities within each of their episode productions. The audio critics, no matter their audience niche or organizational structure, all provided branded openings to their episodes, offered first impressions and a synopsis of the film in the first one-third of the conversation, and ended their content with conversational sign-offs.

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This section unpacks the activities that all five of the audio critics completed. The activities represented routines of a field and were influenced by the institutional level of analysis because each critic followed them with only slight variations to account for organizational and individual influences (Shoemaker & Reese, 2014). The activities represent something the audio critics did because of the challenges and forces they all face competing in the podcast ecosystem and providing a product grounded in film criticism. The branded openings reflect a routine that confronts the market forces as audio critics need to identify themselves to potential listeners. They may need to offer their first impressions to foster their authenticity with the audience through honest and direct thoughts about the film prior to deeper analysis (Spinelli & Dann, 2019). The audio critics give a synopsis of the film as a tradition and necessity from film review practice at large to ensure the reader/listener is prepared for the analysis (Corrigan, 2015). And they provide a friendly and conversational with interpersonal phrases like "goodbye" because podcasts are intimate bridging mediums between host and listener that form parasocial relationships among groups (Swiatek, 2018). Each of these larger forces apply similar pressure on audio critics that forms a field or practice and represent a habitus among agents.

Bourdieu (1984) explains habitus as the relationship between "the capacity to produce classifiable practices and works, and the capacity to differentiate and appreciate these practices and products (taste)" within a social space (p. 170). Within a few texts, I picked up on several classifiable practices that were tempered through the audio critics' niche, yet extremely recognizable, consistent, and predictable. Bourdieu (1980) also considered habitus as a practice-oriented towards function, which the routine activities of branding, authenticity work, critical work, and signaling intimacy provide. Each of the routine activities observed across the sample offer both a function for the critic and reflect relationships to larger forces around the field of production.

The first activity enacted by every critic in the sample for every episode observed was the branded introduction. Unlike written reviews that are bookended with headers and a user interface that signals the start an article while visually reminding the reader what brand the writer is published within, audio critics need to capture the audience's attention upfront and reinforce who they are in the crowded

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podcast landscape. I quickly came to recognize each critic's opening bars and frequently hummed along to the melody like *Show Me the Meaning's* retro-Hollywood strings or *Pop Culture Happy Hour's* cheery guitar chords. While my close readings of the text required I pay attention to the timestamps, my loose experiences of living within a podcast world showed me the importance of openings and closings: my feed auto-plays the next item, and I don't necessarily check what program is queued to start next. Instead, I find myself relying on the opening music, phrases, and vocal tones to differentiate the listening experiences.

Every critic had a distinctive sound to the podcast, like the intro music of a television show to distinguish one from another. The openings averaged 20-seconds and typically continued the audio critics music behind a consistent phrasing. Each audio critic repeated a specific order of introduction, cadence of speaking, and transition to the content: all these features of repetition build familiarity and trust between critic and listeners (Hancock &McMurtry, 2018). *Most Nitpicking's* playful Bond-era melody lead into Nando and crew's emphatic

> *"what's going on everybody? I am Nando. I am DJ, and I am Diggins. And this is Mostly Nitpicking, a podcast where every week we pick apart a piece of pop culture by looking exclusively at the details. WOOOOOOOOO"*

whereas *Pop Culture Happy Hour* read an overview of the film on top of a happy jingle before saying "and today we are talking about [the film] on Pop Culture Happy Hour by NPR." Each set a tone that distinguished the niche by reviewing its tagline or thesis for their episode. *Mostly Nitpicking* is more joking as it interrogates the logic of films, thus its intro is more playful and less informative of the text and *Pop Culture Happy Hour* orients its listeners to the topic of the episode while centering its legacy-backing and institutional authority from National Public Radio. *The Big Picture* spends about 11 seconds introducing the show over a base-heavy beat with the phrase, "And this is the Big Picture, a conversation show about {text}," while *Black Girl Film Club* tells us that "you are listening to Black Girl Film Club, a podcast where two Black women talk about movies," over a relaxed R&B vibe. *Show Me the Meaning* typically spends the first 15 seconds of the episode greeting the audience to let us know "this is Show Me

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the Meaning, Wisecrack's movie podcast" over a classic Hollywood string melody after a "yo, yo, yo" from Austin Hayden.

The personality of each audio critic podcast manifests in the choices of introduction. I did not locate extensive literature about the branding processes or outcomes for podcasts as the field of research is new and expanding. The opening routines and branding styles of most podcasts being used in case study research were not a focus in the analysis. A next logical research project is a content analysis on the introduction patterns of a large sample for audio critics to determine if this seemingly universal routine constitutes a habitus of podcast film reviews, and how audio critic intros may differ or align with other types of podcast programming.

The next two routines for audio critics as a field reflect strategies to orient the audience to the movie under review while building authenticity and establishing the audience niche. I identified these routine behaviors in the production through the process of color-coding the prefaces, or turns in conversation, and analyzing the discourse as I experienced it within the ethnographic framework. That data collection and analytical process allowed me to visualize of the patterns appearing within and across the sample. Fairly quickly into this work, I noticed how each critic and episode had colors indicating types of content in similar orders and places in the discourse. Across the sample, color indictors for film descriptions frequently appeared near the start of episodes, which led to my understanding of the synopsis routine. Those color indicators for film descriptions also pointed me to the routine of giving first impressions, and often those activities happened near each other in episodes.

I quickly came to expect from every episode a distinct segment where the hosts share their initial impressions of the film. For *Pop Culture Happy Hour*, often Glen Weldon or Linda Holmes would open the conversation after introductions with a cheery, "What is your impression of the film today" (Stephen, December 6, 2020, 2:10, Link) or "I want to ask you first, what you thought, you have seen many a Pixar movie" (Linda, December 28, 2020, 1:58, Link). And most episodes across the sample used the first impression prompt as a warmup to the discussion and a chance for each host on the podcast to share. Podcasters operate in an intimate space as they invite listeners into their conversations and sharing their

personal opinions or "takes" on a film may be a strategy to build authenticity intimacy via more personal disclosure for audio critics (Spinelli & Dann, 2019; Swiatek, 2018). The first impressions let me get to know the hosts and their perspectives while setting up the eventual discourse for the podcast itself, as often happened with *Show Me the Meaning*; in its episode on <u>Ready Player One</u>, Raymond Creamer spoke about the easter eggs and nostalgia in the film, which Austin Hayden made a point to write down and prime listeners for the discussion topics.

> *December 11, 2020, 6:40, [Link](#)*
> *I am just taking down a note because I really want to get back to the nostalgia, easter eggs, and things like that. But we will get to that after the recap.*

The first impressions set a tone for the conversation while pointing the audience to the niche of discourse. *Show Me the Meaning* aligned with the interpretive niche (to ground interpretations of a text in common language and experiences), and its first impressions tended to hint at the content ahead, sometimes explicitly as with <u>Ready Player One</u>, and other times through implication like in <u>Bad Santa</u>. Austin shared that his first impression of the film was too dark given the experience of the 2020 pandemic and that "I think I had like a barrier that prevented me from being able to enjoy the film. But that doesn't mean I don't think there isn't interesting stuff for us to talk about in the film" (December 18, 2020, 6:46). The crew went on to discuss the dark humor and what the imagined audience for the film's tone represents in society.

Pop Culture Happy Hour consistently centered first-impressions through a lens of the text with the hosts sharing their broad takes on the style, tone, plotting, and artistic qualities of the movie. Glen's first impression of <u>The Midnight Sky</u>[38] follows the routine neatly:

> *December 22, 2020, 5:18, [Link](#)*
> *I recommend it if you are up for a quiet, kind of strangely mournful weekend afternoon viewing. I ultimately don't think it is as thinky as it thinks it is, and that comes down to the screen play.*

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[38] <u>The Midnight Sky</u>, 2020. *This post-apocalyptic tale follows Augustine, a lonely scientist in the Arctic, as he races to stop Sully and her fellow astronauts from returning home to a mysterious global catastrophe.*

And the conversation revolved around the settings, the themes of light and dark harshness, and the issues in the screenplay. These impressions closely aligned with the canonical niche of review to discuss the artistic qualities of a text within the framework of critical evaluation.

The Big Picture often provided context on the actors, directors, and context on the production or distribution when sharing the first impressions of the films. This podcast most aligned in a technical niche that elevates the practitioners and practices of cultural production. The episode on Tenet was a re-watch for Amanda and Sean, so they brought a guest (and Editorial Director at The Ringer) Chris Ryan to share his first impression: "I loved it. I loved it. It is going to be a great What If. You know how on *Stadio*, our Ringer Pod, they do those great What If pods. If you guys every do a what if, I would love to know what would the impact on the pop culture have been if Tenet had actually gotten to a massive audience" (December 17, 2020, 7:38, Link). Chris followed the same general routine as his audio critic colleagues, demonstrating the organizational influence on routines because the Ringer Network is a sports and entertainment media network that shares industry news and analysis. The conversation about Tenet discussed the director's career and filmography and the financial impacts of Tenet.

Black Girl Film Club and *Mostly Nitpicking* share impressions that often focus their experiences of a film for the audience, which prime listeners for their interpretive (to ground interpretations of a text in common language and experiences) and affective (to express an experience with the text) niches of review. *Black Girl Film Club* often demonstrated flexible conversation patterns as observed in its first impressions of Batman Returns (1992) after an hour of conversation about the Batman character, factoids about the film, and context on why it chose it for a podcast. *Black Girl Film Club's* episode was 159:57 minutes long, yet the first impressions of the movie were presented in 59 minutes which is in the opening one-third of their conversation. Britney focused her impression on what she enjoyed experiencing after sharing with the audience that her dad took her to Taco Bell first and bought her a Bat Girl cup to drink at the theater because she loved Bat Girl. The characters continued to resonate for Britney:

For me at the time, I liked it because it had Bat Girl. She was my girl, I loved Barbara Gordan, Babs. But I also love my baby Dick Greyson. I love him. You know I love Dick Greyson. You know I love Robin. You know I love Knight Wing. That's my boy. And I have been saying it for years.

The conversation continued to position the importance of social context for older films and how the experience of a film changes across the decades. They also went on to discuss the treatment of the women characters in the Batman universe. *Mostly Nitpicking* also shares the experience of watching the film. It selects films that are likely to have issues in internal logic, and the first impressions often showcase how far they will roast the content. The tonal framework for the reviews is exemplified by Nando sharing his reaction to Jiu Jitsu[39]:

December 4, 2020, 22:25, Link

This was the first instance of VOM…video on mistake. Because I don't think anybody watched this movie and didn't immediately try to get a refund. Everything about this movie was bad. I have it here and am going to play it again while we… I also watched this movie like a week ago and some of it has fluttered away from my memory"

Overall, the first impressions offered the audience an entry point into the episode conversation and served as a vehicle for the hosts to share more about its point of view to the listeners. The consistency in which the first impressions were given in this sample can be tested with a larger scope to identify if first impressions offer strong predictability on the audience niche. If so, this routine could be used to help podcast researchers more quickly identify samples that fit their study scope, for example. This routine could be fruitful in larger categorization projects as well as have consumer applications if the first impressions help people assess their interest in the audio critic's content.

Another way the audio critics set up their episodes was the routine of providing a synopsis of the film. All the critics typically gave an overview of either the narrative or beats early in the episode,

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[39] Jiu Jitsu, 2020. *Every six years, an ancient order of jiu-jitsu fighters joins forces to battle a vicious race of alien invaders. But when a celebrated war hero goes down in defeat, the fate of the planet and mankind hangs in the balance.*

following a similar pattern to the opening impressions that speak to the niche they inhabit for the community as well as representing a basic practice for film criticism. A synopsis for film review will broadly explain the narrative for the audience and represents a common routine for criticism at large. However, the extent of the synopsis and consistency in delivery seems to vary widely based on school and author purpose (McWhirter, 2016; Corrigan, 2015). Critics printed in a newspaper or online article may not provide robust synopsis given the limitations on space and technological infrastructures. Audiences can grab the complete synopsis of a film from Wikipedia, IMDb, and countless other sites with a Google Search. Additionally, critics are often constructed as thought-leaders who evaluate a text beyond descriptive content, which spending too much time on the synopsis undermines. The ability to produce discourse provides the potential market value for both organization and the author (Giannetti, 2011; McWhirter, 2016; Hurault-Paupe, 2015). Critics must balance the need to inform the audience of the basic story without relying on a description of the plot to frame their content—they often do not spend 100+ words describing the plot to a reader who can easily click away. Audio critics on the other hand demonstrated less concern or constraints to the synopsis line. The podcast medium removes the limitations on space, though organizational constraints may influence the length of conversation, and the podcast audience seems willing to listen or at least skip ahead 15 seconds via the infrastructure on Spotify as demonstrated by the continued practice from the critics and lack of visible response from the audiences on the topic of synopsis.

A synopsis can focus on three aspects of the narrative: the story of the events that happen, the plotting or arrangement of events, and the narration that organizes the plot (Corrigan, 2015). While all forms of film criticism surely consider the narrative when constructing their reviews, the audio critics are more explicit in providing narrative synopsis. Typically, the audio critics did this in the first third of the conversation and used the synopsis as a transitioning point between their opening remarks, impressions, or news and culture content. The legacy-backed audio critics tended to provide a story synopsis by highlighting the events of the narrative while the crowd-backed critics tended to provide more plot synopses by describing the sequence of events to the audience. The synopsis often was used as "table-

setting" to build context for the ensuing conversation as demonstrated by *Pop Culture Happy Hour* with

actor credits during the synopsis of The Prom.

> *Glen, December 10, 2020,2:53, [Link](#)*
>
> *Let's do some table setting. You've got Emma, played by Jo Ellen Pellman, her girlfriend Alyssa played by Ariana DeBose, is still in the closet and the couple decides to use the Prom as a coming out event. Alyssa's mother, played here by Kerri Washington, is the head of the PTA and cancels the prom, turning Emma into a pariah. Meanwhile back in New York, Broadway Diva Dee Dee Allen, played by Meryl Streep, and the uh flamboyant Barry Glickman played by the great ubiquity and inescapable inevitability James Corden, along with pals played by Nicole Kidman and Andrew Rannells, decide they need to power wash their tarnished reputation by adopting a cause. And Emma fits the bill.*

Pop Culture Happy Hour provides the story beats and allows the audience to infer the ending as the

conversation transitions into initial impressions by the hosts. The table-setting function for the synopsis

allows audio critics to tease topics of eventual conversation, in similar ways to the first impressions.

Other critics used the synopsis less as a table-setting and more as an in-depth foundation to

explore the themes of a film, such as *Show Me the Meaning*, who read a plot synopsis before most

conversations. The plot synopsis provides the events of the story in sequence and can be considered a

spoiler because all the details are shared. Audio critics like *Show Me the Meaning* who contribute

discourse focused on interpretive unpacking of the meaning in a film require the hosts and the listening

audience begin from the same place of understanding. *Show Me the Meaning* does not seem to assume the

audience knows the story, even when the film is a decades old classic as with Ferris Bueller's Day Off.

> *Austin, December 4, 2020, 10:04, [Link](#)*
>
> *Ferris Bueller is a high school senior who fakes an illness to get out of school for the 9th time this school year. His naive and caring parents buy his, "I'm so sick" schtick and let him stay home so he can rest, all to the chagrin of his sister, Jeanie, played by Jennifer Grey, who knows that it is all BS, and is jealous that he gets the special treatment while she is never given such leeway. His parents go to work while Jeanie goes to school and Ferris sips drinks by the pool while breaking the fourth wall, explaining to the audience about who he is and how he got away with his little deceit. At school rumors are flying around that Ferris is on his death bed or whatever so sympathies fly around. And the villain is, although as Jess from New Girl points out is in the right, Vice Principal Rooney knows that Ferris is scamming and tries to prove it by contacting Ferris' mom who assures him that Ferris is actually sick. But Rooney smells that something is up so he begins his mission to catch Ferris lying. Ferris convinces his best friend Cam, Cameron, to come hang out and lures Ferris girlfriend, Sloan, out of school by pretending to be her father and faking a family death. It works. So, Ferris and Cam grab Cam's dad's Ferrari and pick up Sloan from school, where Ferris poses as Sloan's dad in the parking lot at a distance from Rooney's watchful eye and so then when Sloan approaches*

Ferris posing as her dad they make out and Rooney is a little bit weirded out by that because he thinks it her dad. [chorus of that is such a weird moment by the group, quotes the line do you have a kiss for daddy?]. The trio then head downtown, oh and also, we are in Chicago here. So, they park the Ferrari with the parking attendants who take the car for a joy ride. And then the trio began to explore the city. They go to the top of Sears Tower, they catch a Cubs game, a couple of other things. They go to the museum. And Ferris does a sick lip sync routine on top of a float during the Von Steuben Day Parade. Meanwhile VP Rooney snoops around the Bueller household but gets caught up in all times of ridiculous pratfalls. Jeanie decides to skip school herself to confront Ferris but while at home she runs into Rooney in her house, knocks him out with a nice karate kick, calls the cops to report that there is an intruder in the house. Rooney gets up, flees the house, and runs out but leaves his wallet behind on the kitchen floor. When the cops arrive, they think that Jeanie was prank calling them, so they take her to the station for a calling a false report. While in the station she meets a hunky delinquent played by Charlie Sheen who tells her to chill. She is like, yeah you are right, so they make out a little bit. The trio then finish their journey in the city and then head home to drop off the Ferrari. Back at Cam's they are trying to reverse the milage on the car by putting it up on some blocks and then driving it in reverse. They think that is going to take the mileage down but that doesn't work. So, Cam finally goes to a breaking point and snaps and starts beating the shit out of his dad's car. He ends up knocking the car off the blocks and because the car is in reverse the car then speeds backwards out the garage, which is this beautiful like windowed garage up over a ravine. The car flies through the glass, crashing into the ravine below, destroying the car. Ferris offers to take the blame, but Cam says no and that he is going to do it because it is finally his time to stand up to his pops. So, Ferris ends up walking Sloan home and realizes that it is just about time for Ferris' parents to be home. So, he has to race back to the house. Just as he arrives, however, he runs into Rooney at the back porch who is just about to bust in. But the now elated Jeanie, presumably because she just got some of that Charlie Sheen tiger blood winning magic, she has now had a change of heart. So, she actually joins Ferris' side and threatens Rooney by reminding him that he left his wallet on the kitchen floor and saying that he broke into the house, so then Rooney gets all scared and he runs off. Jeanie is still all floating on clouds. And Ferris runs upstairs, jumps into bed, just as the parents are able to get into the door to check on him. They see that he is sleeping safe and sound. He is also all hot and sweaty and clammy. So, they are like 'oh my god he is really sick, maybe he should stay home another day.' And the Ferris of course gets away with all the shenanigans. But then at the end he looks into the camera and tells the audience the mantra of the film: life moves pretty fast, if you don't stop and look around once in a while you could miss it.

The conversation from *Show Me the Meaning* expanded on themes of cultural values, class, privilege, high school, anti-heroism, and American capitalist ethos. The thematic analysis would fall flat if the audience doesn't know or remember the little details that help it argue for certain meaning. As a listener, I am very prepared to unpack the interpretations of this film with the audio critic even if it had been a while since viewing it.

The stark differences in how each critic frames their episodes within their first impressions and their synopses provides clues for the audience about the niche and goal of the review. A listener looking for sophisticated reviews of the art would know quickly that *Mostly Nitpicking* is not reviewing a film through a canonical niche based on the first impressions it provides and the way it turns synopsis into a

game show among the hosts. *Mostly Nitpicking* plays the "IMDbEE with Two EEs Spelled Out like Spelling Bee" game where they make each other guess the IMDb summary, usually poorly. And likewise, an audience member looking for a technical niche for film discourse would get that sense from the production-focused and direct way that *The Big Picture* summarizes the film in relation to who the director is and aspects of cultural production. It provides just enough of a synopsis to orient the audience within the industry and assume that the listener has awareness to what the play is to know that this movie is that story:

> *Sean, December 21, 2020, 13:06, Link*
> *This was number 1 on Netflix's Top 10, which was a surprise to me. And not because it is not a movie starring movie stars and not because it isn't an important piece of work. It is a very important piece of work, directed by George C. Wolfe who is a legendary Broadway director, and it is adapted from the iconic August Wilson 1984 play, which is one of the installments of his Pittsburgh cycle. But still, it is a smaller drama. And we had this conversation in the aftermath of* Mank *when* Mank *clearly did not penetrate the consciousness of Netflix viewers, and it was only very briefly on that Top 10. But Ma Rainey has emerged as a big time Oscar contender. It is one of the most meaningful and talked about movies of the year, for a variety of reasons, with Chadwick Boseman not least among them.*

The interpretive communities around audio criticism can be classified by the ways they, the podcasters, and their audiences, relate to and decode films (Benshoff, 2016; Jenkins, 2003/2012). For some audiences, the admiration for film production provides more value while others find the storytelling of the experience with the film more satisfying. Fragmented audiences have the opportunity within the podcast culture to find the niche community experience they desire (Spinelli & Dann, 2019). Ultimately, consumers can move easily through various critical niches to find the interpretive community they identify with most, which presents research opportunities in audience reception and analysis. The community niches also present opportunities to expand on work about taste cultures, which have been constructed in largely high to low ways rather than diverging lateral groups (Gans, 1999). Much of those projects will be aided with the understanding that impressions and synopsis are helpful in identifying the audio critics niche early in each episode.

Just as every episode features a consistent introduction, the audio critics also demonstrated consistent sign-off routines to signal the end of the show with a conversational appeal. Each episode, and

some of them span literal hours, builds intimacy between critic and listener as inherent to the podcast medium (Spinelli & Dann, 2019; Swiatek, 2018). The sign-off routine served to kindly disconnect from the "conversation" we were having, usually a form of *thank you for listening*, while setting up a future interaction like a form of *see you next time*. For example, *Black Girl Film Club* signed off with a cheery "Bye Everybody!" as its R&B beat faded into the end of the audio file. *The Big Picture* was a bit more direct with the typical, "See you then" after outlining what or when the next episode would be released. The directness resonates themes of its business-minded and technical niche, while *Black Girl Film Club* felt more relaxed like I was leaving a kickback sponsored by a film club on campus. And *Mostly Nitpicking* typically ended with the groups' Twitter handles and a chorus of the three guys yelling at me "Goodbye everybody, Goodbye! Woooooo," which made me chuckle frequently like I was saying goodbye to friends after a party. The routine is something inherent to audio and visual mediums as newscasters have their signature sign-off, YouTubers maintain a consistent end of episode ritual, and Gene Siskel and Roger Ebert ended their groundbreaking film review tv show with a "We will see you next time, at the movies" while looking into the camera.

Unlike in writing, where the page signals that the article is over, audio critics end the conversation as one does when speaking to a group. They almost all thanked the listeners for supporting their work or just joining the conversation, as with *Pop Culture Happy Hour's* "Thank you for listening. We will see you all right back here next time/week." A sense of genuine gratitude laced through the closing statements. As the critics told me "goodbye" or "we will see you soon" I found myself instinctively saying goodbye back. Future research can be coupled with the work on podcast branding and introduction choices to evaluate larger trends in the field around the sign-on and sign-off culture. Another qualitative study could interview the creators, asking questions about their choices in branding the introductions and sign-offs. An audience-focused study could ask listeners how they perceive audio critics and podcasts to be like based on the introduction and outro routines as well. The intimacy of podcasting offers opportunities to study production and consumption behaviors through frameworks of interpersonal communication, for example.

A last potential routine, which I cannot argue as a unifying habitus due to a lack of consistent observation but should be studied in the future, is the selection of films. During the sampling period of December and January 2020/2021, COVID-19 continued to peak across the world and in the United States. The US experienced increases in percent positivity, with national averages above 13% hospitalizations and deaths rising (Centers for Disease Control and Prevents, Dec. 11, 2020). Vaccines were not widely available in most states for anyone over 18 until April 2021, and movies were largely not being released as movie theaters were either still closed or at limited capacity. But the few movies that did come out, either in theaters or video on demand, were covered by most critics within a few weeks, pointing towards a possible field-level routine related to the text selections. For example, Soul was covered by three of the five critics and released only on Disney + on December 25, 2020. Four of the five critics also covered Wonder Woman 1984, also released to VOD on December 25, 2020, within three weeks.[40] Film review selection may follow a similar routine to journalists, given the proximity between journalists and critics, who tend to cover "breaking news events," and items with audience appeal to increase the potential traffic to the story (Deuze, 2008; Shoemaker & Reese, 2014). Films that are involved in a recent controversy or a popular cultural news event might be selected at higher rates for discussion on podcasts to similarly increase potential listenership. The "breaking news" routine relates to films that have some controversy around them, such as Tenet, which was covered by three of the five critics the week it was released to video on demand.[41] Tenet was originally released in theaters in July during U.S. quarantine guidance with Christopher Nolan claiming a return to cinema. When it made relatively little money at the box office compared to projected sales, the coverage was wide, and its release to VOD was anticipated.[42] People who hadn't ventured to a movie theater for the summer release could now view the project in their own homes, and these audio critics covered the event.

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[40] Soul coverage: *PCHH*, Dec. 27; *TBP*, Dec. 31, *SMTM*, Jan. 22. Wonder Woman 1984 coverage: *PCHH*, Dec. 23; *TBP*, Dec. 25; *MNP*, Dec. 29; *SMTM*, Jan. 15.
[41] Tenet coverage: *TBP*, Dec. 17; *PCHH*, Dec. 21; *MNP*, Dec. 23.
[42] The perception of Tenet's "failure" was widely covered by entertainment and traditional journalists. The general sentiment placed Tenet losing upwards of 100million dollars and prompted the Warner Brother's plan with HBOMax to release movies on streaming in 2021.

I would be interested in a quantitative inquiry that analyzes the genres, release dates, and distribution channels of audio critic selections across their archives of content. A future study could also unpack the diversity of directors, lead actors, or narrative subjects selected by critics to theorize from a sociological standpoint on what receives discourse attention or the state of the industry. In this sample, 19 of the 20 reviewed films are directed by men, and most films were either PG-13 or rated R. And finally, comparing the film selection of audio critics to legacy critics may routines and traditions between mediums of the industry and where audiences may turn for specific types of film discourse and coverage.

In summary, audio critics demonstrated four unifying routines that indicate a habitus for podcast film reviewers. The habitus represents the practices within a production system that actors of that field follow, typically for functional reasons, that can classify and distinguish a field (Bourdieu, 1984). The audio critics were consistent across the sample in branding through music and distinctive openings for the audience, which theory on the institutional influences of the market and podcast space helps explain. While each brand was different, the routine of creating and using the branded elements represent a habitus within podcast criticism. All of the critics also participated in sharing first impressions and a synopsis of the film, and the lens they shared the impressions through set up the nature of the discussion and point of view they would speak through. And finally all of the critics participated in the routine of signing off the episodes, typically by thanking the listeners and wrapping the conversation with a goodbye. Podcasts reflect an intimate medium that dictates some ending rituals to close the experience between listener and hosts. The unifying routines of the audio critics present intriguing opportunities for future research. Media scholars and sociologists could study the impressions for ways to classify and predict film discoures, study the openings for marketing and brand association trends, and study the closings for mediated interpersonal communication strategies and parasocial relationships. Each aspect can provide insight into the state of the industry and state of discourse through podcasters. We can also look beyond film criticism for these routines of podcasts across industries for insight into the field of podcast production culture or across mediums for film criticism in visual spaces.

4.3 Chapter Summary: Reflecting on Routines of the Field

This project used methods of ethnographic inquiry to experience, categorize, and visualize the patterns of discursive activities across a case study of five audio critics. The case study analysis in Chapter 3 revealed how each critic was situated within the ecosystem of film criticism in diverging ways via the niche and the organizational influences. In this chapter, I focused on the group's routines to respond to the research questions of what extent to audio critics follow legacy routines and which discursive activities form a habitus for the field. After listening, and relistening to nearly 56 hours and 47 episodes of content, clear answers emerged for the event genres that audio critics create with their discourses and routines that each followed, suggesting institutional-level influences on their practice beyond organizational or individual choices. The unifying routines speak to the formation of a habitus, which reflects structuring structures that allows society to classify systems of production and fields of practice (Bourdieu, 1984). These five audio critics enacted genres and production routines so consistently and distinctively, that a subfield of criticism can be distinguished and further studied as a potentially bounded field of practice. This study contributed eight genres that audio critics may align their episodes within those researchers and consumers can use to classify the content. This project also identified four of those routines that spark additional research questions for a field of knowledge growing in sophistication alongside the formalization of the podcast sphere (Spinelli & Dann, 2019).

Patterns of genre events that mirror and extend expectations of film criticism were documented consistently in the study. The audio critics created movie reviews and the critical reviews, genre forms easily recognizable as criticism, while providing commentary on news and culture or focusing more on the experience of the film. The critics were not contained to single topics or frameworks to discuss films, and so they often created genre events that overlapped. Additionally, each critic approached genre events through its community niche some stronger associations to niche and genre. For example, the affective niche centered on experience with the film tended to produce logic interrogations that ask questions of the film's internal structures. Even when the niche was technical or canonical and the genres reflected critical review to focus on aspects of the text's art and elemental functions, the critics push back on expectations

of impersonal and technical explanations and into spaces where their audience can connect, build some forms of intimacy, and gauge their own reception to a film based within the niche selected. The experience of this study reinforced to me the value of a media diet comprised of several audio critics, spanning different niches, because listening to several discussions of the same film creates a network of discourse for audiences to entangle themselves within.

The audio critics also followed four unifying routines that can be used to by media scholars, sociologists, and communication or marketing researchers for insight into the subfield of criticism and audience niches for interpreting texts. The routines of opening branding, impressions, synopsis, and conversation closers appeared very consistently across the sample while offering some predictive value in who the audio critic was speaking for. The qualities that the audio critic emphasized, provided indication for the dicourse. *Mostly Nitpicking* opens with a bit of chaos from an Austin Powers-like theme song and "wooooohooooooos" from the hosts, which set the tone for their somewhat chaotic but ever affective (entertaining) conversations. On the other hand, *Pop Culture Happy Hour* was very commercial in its sweet jingle that welcomed audiences to the show as if it were playing on the radio and indicating its journalist ties to outlined, contained canonical criticism. And the pattern continued for the way the first impressions highlighted aspects of the conversation that might be covered or how the synopsis set up the entire film or just the agents of production. Each aspect can provide insight into the state of the industry and the state of discourse through podcasters.

The work presented in Chapter 4 about the genres and routines of audio criticism was important because little literature existed on film discourse in the podcast space prior. Robust research into educational content, fictional content, crime dramas, and science podcasts provided a framework for my study, but locating knowledge on entertainment and film podcasts was challenging. Similarly, robust literature on film and art criticism exists, which helped frame this study, but I found it could not map directly onto the new medium. This research and chapter contributes to the field of knowledge about podcasters with the attention to and questions about branding routines and sign-off culture that is consistent enough to be further explored. This chapter also contributes to knowledge to film criticism by

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identifying how classic genres manifest in the audio space while new genres need to be considered and used in the frameworks for future audio critic studies. The genre frameworks could be applied to audiovisual spaces for criticism as well, such as YouTube. And lastly, the findings of the routines, particularly how the activities with providing the first impressions and a synopsis aligned with the critical niche can provide a structure for research to more quickly classify episodes or programs of audio criticism without listening to entire multi-hour texts first. In future studies, I plan on leveraging the expectation that a synopsis and first impression will appear in the first 1/3 of the episode to identify either samples for a larger project or to approach audio critic analysis through methods of content analysis that might answer questions requiring larger scopes and sample sizes.

The final chapter in this document, Chapter 5, will review what was unpacked in the case analyses with the influences of organization and niches to directly summarize the response to each research question presented in Chapter 2.

CHAPTER 5.   CONCLUSIONS: SITUATING THE CRITICAL FIELD

I entered this qualitative study with questions about how podcasters review films, interact with the audience, and contribute to film and media discourse. The literature exploring podcast cultures and that of film criticism had not intersected to a large extent, and this ethnographic inquiry into a case study of five podcast film critics provides an entry point audio criticism scholarship. The research umbrella drew from film writing and critique cultures (Corrigan, 2015; McWhirter, 2016) and podcast analyses (Llinares, Fox, & Berry, 2018; Spinelli & Dann, 2019) to situate the patterns of discourse and production activities (Fairclough, 2003) within a framework of media sociology (Shoemaker & Reese, 2014). I took a deep dive into five case studies, engaging with over 55 hours of conversation and exploring their social technologies in the winter of 2020/2021. While a play participant in the ethnographic process (Tracey, 2020), I theorized on how the content could be influenced by organizational or economic systems in Chapter 3 and categorized their discourse to visualize similarities and differences in Chapter 4. This meso-level analysis considered the data from the individuals within a collective group to focus more on the larger patterns across the audio critic culture (Kozinets, 2010). Therefore, the analysis and examples served not as a means of close rhetorical critique of their goodness or accuracy in evaluating the films but instead as indicators of what, more generally, audio critics talk about within the culture of film review.

The time spent with *Show Me the Meaning*, *Pop Culture Happy Hour*, *The Big Picture*, *Mostly Nitpicking*, and *Black Girl Film Club* illuminated patterns of discourse and trends in the communication events across the sample. Each case was purposefully selected based on the audience size—ranging from 1,000 to 40,000+ followers, its structure with national networks and 'amateur' creators, and the alignment to a traditional School of Criticism. While McWhirter's honeycomb construction of the six schools of criticism—based on qualitative content analyses and interviews with film critics producing written content for newspapers, websites, and blogs—was valuable in the initial sampling, the audio critics did not align well with the way McWhirter described the "critical manifesto (how they operate in

the sphere of film criticism at base level)" for the schools of criticism (2016, location 1344/4850). The conversations, some spanning hours, diverged too far from McWhirter's definitions of the schools, and a new framework to describe overarching conversation entry points emerged. I put forward critical niches that the podcasters facilitated and framed the conversation around, which allowed for more flexibility in the categorization and openness in the descriptions. The critics spoke to interpretative, canonical, technical, and affective niches that produced distinct and readily recognizable themes in the discourses. In addition to niches of discourse, many audio critics contributed to the ecosystem of entertainment through parallel content on YouTube or within their professional sphere as pop culture writers. Both the niches and alternative content are entry points for additional exploration into the overall contributions of transmedia work within media industries.

Despite the differences in organizational structures and niches of discourse, the critics enacted similarities in their production activities that point towards institution-level influences and a potential field (Shoemaker & Reese, 2014). Each critic consistently followed similar branding behaviors to open their podcasts, provided first impressions, used a synopsis to set up the conversation, and followed recognizable genres of film criticism. The first impressions and synopsis aligned closely to the niche of discourse the audio critic facilitated. These consistent production and discursive routines, if evident across larger sample sizes of audio critics, could provide structures for predicting the niches of critics and anchor points for scholarship to further situate the discourses produced as podcast cultures continue to formalize.

And lastly, the critics leveraged the technological infrastructures on social media and within podcast production to engender social relations with their audiences. Some used live streaming tools or voicemail for audience interaction, while others fostered public forums for discourse on social networking sites, though with little moderation of the activity (Wolfgang, Blackburn & McConnell, 2020). Additional work on those public forums exclusively will provide more answers on how audio critics perceive their audiences and the purpose of their content. The economic factors, as podcasts become less of an aspirational labor force and more formalized for financial gain (Sullivan, 2018), can be traced for insights into the community relationships too. In this sample, three of the five received external sponsorships and

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funding with advertising breaks in line with broadcast patterns. A fourth received sponsorship funding but did not readily advertise or publicize the income source. Their sponsorship deals also illuminated some of the imagination around whom is believed to listen and support their work. Within such a small sample, the economic analysis seemed to align with the critical niches as well.

The data, analysis, and insights from Chapters 3 and 4 provided the information needed to respond to the overarching question of this study: how do we situate audio critics within media discourse? This concluding chapter reviews the responses to the research questions presented in Chapter 2.1 by connecting the information across Chapters 3 and 4. I provide a subsection for each of the research questions with succinct explanations and examples from the previous chapters. After reviewing the findings of this study, I present future projects that align with a career studying the intersection of audio-visual critics within the institution of media.

5.1 Where do audio critics contribute to the ecosystem of networked content within the institution of entertainment media?

How can scholars classify audio critics to identify their positions within the media ecosystem?

In this qualitative and focused research, consistent, recognizable patterns emerged both within and across the case studies that led to the emergence of four critical niches and a distinct style for audio critic content. These niches and styles can be used to identify the audio critics' positions within the media ecosystem. Additionally, audio critics contributed content outside of the podcasting space through parallel channels like YouTube or through their professional roles as journalists and pop culture writers. When asking where audio critics contribute, the response identifies niche spaces of discourse for podcasts and forms of YouTube content as the primary locations observed in this study. The audio critics also contribute to racialized aspects in media discourse when presented with salient texts and coming from an interpretative point of view without influences from market-oriented organizational concerns. In this study, the crowd-backed critics conducted far more pointed critiques of socio-political events and offered more racialized interpretations of the texts than the legacy-backed critics navigating higher-order

structures from their organizations' marketing revenue. In addition, remnants of taste cultures can be traced to each of the discursive niches and contributions of the audio critics to the ecosystem as each vain of discourse embodies qualities associated with popular culture taste publics. While operating in a hyper-fragmented economy of podcasts, the audio critics developed products that fit into the needs of taste publics and can be further studied and considered within the framework of subcultural programming, a process where fragmented creators find their audience and produce work for niche taste publics (Gans, 1999). Future research can turn to these sites to contribute further literature on the institution of entertainment media.

While all the critics tended to talk about the writing, characters, performances, technical editing, and physical world connections in some capacity as required by the nature of a film discussion, the flow and tone of the discourse differed by critical niche and style to reflect the taste culture and organization they were producing within. The critical niche represents the dominant perspective and discursive purpose to which the community can be categorized. Podcasts are an intimate bridging medium, which means the content provides access points for individuals to situate themselves by interest or knowledge groups (Swiatek, 2018). Podcasters provide their expertise and point of view on a topic to which listeners are seeking out that frame to follow. The podcast space is competitive with listeners holding a great deal of choice and autonomy in what they consume. The critical niche emerges because of the inherent necessity of podcasters to provide a common goal and form publics where their audience can build a connection and expect a type of content (Spinelli & Dann, 2019). The niche of the critic was constructed in this study by mapping the evaluations of the film conversations and thinking critically on the overall experience as an audience member. An evaluation is the use of the conversation by the primary interactants, meaning the point of the discussion amongst the hosts (Young, 2004). I followed the flow of the conversation by marking the prefaces or turns in the topic and classifying what the point of the topic was based on the way that the critics shared and interacted with each other. By pairing the narrative analysis within the episodes and the discourse analysis of event genres across the sampling period, I readily understood the type of

community and interest group associated with the audio critic. Basically, listening to that many episodes

with some structured thinking generated four interest groups, meaning niches of discourse for criticism.

Table 15: Niches Defined with Contributions

Name of the Niche	Definition	Contributions and Implications
Canonical Niche	an interest group focused on discussing the artistic qualities of a text within the framework of critical evaluation. The canonical niche centers the art form and mechanisms of storytelling.	The canonical audio critic speaks to its audience about how the mechanisms of storytelling function in the film. For example, how the score punctuates the dynamic of a scene. The canonical niche is a traditional discourse area for film criticism, drawing on conventions of movie review and critical review to evaluate a film and prepare an audience to see and judge its qualities.
Technical Niche	an interest group that elevates the practitioners and practices of cultural production. The technical niche centers the creative agents and signifiers of industry.	The technical audio critic often talks about market influences and outcomes for films along with industry accolades and context. For example, how the director's career influences the film and how this work might be considered for an Academy Award. The technical niche runs closely to the Trade School of Criticism that predicts financial or critical metrics through an understanding of tase. The distinction is less focus on audience metrics and more focus inside the industry.
Interpretive Niche	a community interested in grounding interpretations of a text in common language and experiences. The interpretive niche explains themes of the movie and centers the symbolic interactions between text and viewer.	The audio critic forming an interpretive niche offers critical or intellectual discourses about the film in accessible ways that invite the audience into the discussion. For example, explaining how a film represents nostalgia and what that means within society. The interpretive niche holds potential for critical consciousness raising within the community.
Affective Niche	an interest group that expresses an experience with the text. The affective niche places the thoughts and feelings of the viewer in relation to the film.	The affective niche centers the thoughts, questions, and emotions that the text provoked. For example, how a film was confusing and left questions about plot holes. The affective niche represents an entertainment-focused experience for listeners; however, the affective niche does not mean the discourse is inherently shallow or lacking in analysis. This niche is simply more concerned with shared experience in relation to a film.

The niches, or interest groups, within audio criticism solidify the theory on market fragmentation of the digital age while connecting to older analysis of taste and audience consumption patterns. Market fragmentation produced the most significant change for film criticism: increasing pressure to entertain audiences and compete for attention (Hakola, 2015). McWhirter recognized that niches exist in print and online film critics, though his research contextualized the niche within the populist school most closely. The populist school considers the audience above critical or intellectual thought to ultimately advertise the film and their publication to the public. Because the populist school, and the audience niches within that construction, didn't adequately describe the discourses within this sample, the framework of the interest group serves audio critics and podcast research more readily. The podcasters do need to consider their audience because of the increased pressure to entertain and compete; however, the audience was not clearly placed above critical thought or even the desires of the audio critics. *Mostly Nitpicking* openly disregarded reviews from its audience because that is "part of their thing," and *The Big Picture* produced a special episode dismissing feedback about its review of <u>Wonder Woman 1984</u>. Rather than the audio critics conforming to a specific audience, it appears they provide their expertise and point of view to allow interested audience members to join the community. In these ways, they reflect agents of subcultural programming to "provide cultural content to express and satisfy the specific standards of every taste public" (Gans, 1999, p. 175). If a listener aligns with the interest group and associates with the taste public, welcome to the niche: if they don't like it, they can find another critic aligned with their taste.

Podcasts draw on authenticity and build an intimate trust between host and listener as central to the production of content (Berry, 2018; Spinelli & Dann, 2019; Swiatek, 2018). Authenticity and trust are developed when the right audience finds and resonates with the authentic work and point of view from the critic rather than caving to the pressure of metrics and even advertisers. Even further distinguishing podcasting from written criticism, the podcast space is still formalizing with metrics on viewership behind the power that print/web-based critics have on what drives traffic, from where the audience comes, and other cookies for their demographic profiles (Berry, 2018; Lowrey & Latta, 2008; Shoemaker & Reese, 2014). The categorization of the discourse by interest area—the critical niche—will be useful in situating

where and how audio critics contribute to the field because it represents their expertise and authentic interest in media conversation. The critical niche based on discourse also offers a useful way to categorize audio critics as an outward, community-minded framework that complements the more internal understanding of criticism through the Schools of Critical practice.

The audio critics in this sample also contributed to media discourse through alternative mediums. The use of newsletters and additional written work more so represented the hosts' jobs and positions within the industry. The journalists from *Pop Culture Happy Hour* and content contributors from *The Big Picture* and *Mostly Nitpicking* cited themselves within the media industry. *Pop Culture Happy Hour* and *The Big Picture* hosts write content for the parent organizations, NPR and The Ringer Network. DJ Chapman and Chris Diggins of *Mostly Nitpicking* wrote for thepopbreak.com. Ashley Ayer and Britney Binson from *Black Girl Film Club* are a graphic designer and a part-time writer, respectively. Their additional contributions and situation within the media field are tied to their professions as arts critics, editors, designers, and writers. Additionally, the hosts of *Show Me the Meaning* regularly contribute additional content to a variety of Wisecrack programs across podcast topics, such as *The Squanch* for the Rick and Morty cartoon series or in videos on the main YouTube channel. Additional research, perhaps through an interview protocol, would be useful to understand how these podcasters found their roles and how their organizations consider their work as audio critics within their larger professional obligations.

More interesting to the field of knowledge was how one host, Mathew Kelly (Nando), from *Mostly Nitpicking* contributes to the ecosystem of media content on YouTube. His NandoVMovies channel organized a crowd-sourced collaboration of video essayists on YouTube twice: One Marvelous Scene and One X-Cellent scene. He started the playlist with his own video essay on a scene in Avengers: Age of Ultron where all the prominent characters are building their relationship dynamics—the after-party scene before Ultron crashes the event. That video has over 900,000 views and launched what he described as a project to "take a look back at the Marvel Universe to examine interesting moments, choices, and talk about what made this decade-long cinematic universe special" (Nando v Movies, 2019). He then described assembling talented video essayists across YouTube to contribute to this project. That

playlist now has over 180 videos and 2 Million combined views. While it was started with Nando's post on April 22, 2019, the playlist continued to grow with videos about the new Marvel products like <u>Falcon and the Winter Soldier</u> from 2021. The One X-Cellent Scene collaboration began July 23, 2020, and brought 183 videos with over 300,00 views together during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic. Contributions to this playlist also continue with the latest update on February 12, 2021. Nando contributed to film discourse on YouTube by connecting major channels such as The Take (1.2 million subscribers), Mr. Sunday Movies (1.23M), Captain Midnight (435K) and boosting small creators like Noah with 195 subscribers and 10,000 views on their "Hello, Karen" contribution to the One Marvelous Scene. The cross-over between YouTube and podcast spaces should be explored to better understand how audio-visual critics contribute to the ecosystem and build audiences on multiple platforms. Clearly, collective power and appreciation for film exist in crowd-backed or amateur/hobbyist spaces with immense potential on the discourse.

To theorize a bit on specific ways that audio critics contribute to the media ecosystem, I turn to the literature on critical consciousness and critical practice. Audio critics hold the potential to bring critical consciousness to their community of listeners as public intellectuals. The audio critics can also be tapped to appear across media channels from YouTube interviews (*Black Girl Film Club*) to other podcasts within their network and organization. Added scholarship to examine if the relationship of audio critics to film tends to center on broad readings and descriptions rather than a critical rhetorical practice is needed to build a robust theory of how the niches of discourse intersect with the Schools of Criticism and the mass culture discourse within taste cultures and publics. The scope of this study looked less at how, rhetorically, they discussed films to instead focus on the meso-level routines of what topics were brought up. The next phase of research might dig into the critical practices from a rhetorical point of view within each of the niches identified in this study.

The critical practice of rhetoric locates the discourses of power created and sustained within both text and social practice for transformative, civic actions (McKerrow, 1989). Critical consciousness is the awareness of this power and ability to enact transformative action. With critical consciousness,

individuals can understand their condition and make the informed decisions that strong democracies require (Bates, 1975). The theory of critical consciousness combined with work from Terry Kershaw (1992/2007) on how to turn theory into praxis, particularly using Black Studies, presents a powerful mechanism for activism on the part of audio critics and scholarship on potential power of the medium. The film industry represents an institutionalized structure that maintains the hegemony—the desires of the ruling class—through socialized and intellectual rather than forceful means (Althusser, 1968). Therefore, audio critics who deconstruct film media with a critical practice of rhetoric can create knowledge bridges between enlightened audience members. The enlightening process can come from deconstructing the messages in the media with attention to the racialized histories that continue to influence the current situation of US identity politics, economics, and culture while leveraging tools to incite action and engagement (Kershaw, 1992/2007; Omi & Winant, 2015). Deconstruction interrogates how common sense has been created and where a narrative came to be seen as truth (Scott, 1988). Media texts offer strong sites for the deconstructive process because they exist across time through archives giving materiality to the past social constructions and presenting symbolic meaning to the current lived experience. Many of these audio critics dipped into older films or streaming archives for content, which presents possibilities to critique the collective memory of the audience about the space and time that the film was created.

If done effectively, the audio critics could speak through the interpretive niche that explains concepts in accessible language to translate oppositional or critical readings of the text to the listeners. When the discourse from the audio critics is in accessible terms, the audience can feel empowered to echo and reinscribe those oppositional readings to their peer groups, social media posts, and personal spheres of discourse. Not only can the discourse be made accessible and sophisticated, but podcasts as a tool also hold great potential for the audio critics to feature members of the community closest to the lived-experiences—as seen with *Pop Culture Happy Hour's* guests—that elevates the alternate voices otherwise lost in the fragments of media choices. Both the accessible discussion and the elevating of alternate voices provide modeling opportunities that could produce audience-centered outcomes through

the education-entertainment model that can increase the awareness and motivation of receivers towards a message or action (Nabi & Mayer-Gusè, 2012). Audio critics have the opportunity and potential to educate and incite action towards critical use of the symbols and messages encoded in media products while offering entertaining and accessible content.

The crowd-backed critics speaking through the interpretive niche, *Show Me the Meaning* and *Black Girl Film Club,* held the most potential to do this type of critical consciousness-raising work by regularly unpacking themes, like American Capitalism or class privilege, in context with the messages of the movies. Other critics, again closer to the spectrum of crowd-backed than legacy-backed, provided moments of enlightenment and thought-provoking attention to socio-political aspects of a film. While I cannot posit that they do serve as public intellectuals and raise the overall level of discourse and critical consciousness for the communities, I am asserting that rhetorical analysis on the tools and methods they unpack films with is a path of research to explore. The distinction between the crowd-backed audio critic's ability to discuss and critique power compared to audio critics operating within legacy structures and larger organizations presents a prime space to begin the interrogation of their rhetorical discourse.

A final contribution of audio critics and influence on how to situate various critics within the field rests on the rituals of the cinematic experience in the new media age. Films occupy the social life of many niches in increasingly ritualized ways (Debord, 1977). The enjoyment of the film is tied increasingly to participation in widespread discourse and cognitive analysis (Corrigan, 2015). The experience of viewing a film may be eclipsed and confused with the experience of others' experience with the film representing an evolution to the commodity as spectacle. With the storyteller style, especially, listeners don't even need to see the film to enjoy the experience and feel as if they saw the film itself. This phenomenon of proxy viewing is particularly sensitive to the niche of discourse and the individual desire of the hosts for the audio critic. The proxy viewer will understand and "see" the film through the interpretation of the audio critic including any reinscribing of the dominant reading or receiving oppositional readings from the text (Hall, 1980/2012). An area for research and theory-building is in this ritual that places entertaining discourse about an experience [film] above the film itself as listening to other people describe

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their experience substitutes as our own experience with the film. Podcasts, and YouTube, are intimate and bring the audience into the conversation to make us feel a part of the very experience (Spinelli & Dann, 2019; Swiatek, 2018). One could literally watch every breakdown and podcast about a film and contribute effectively to other cognitive discussions, experience a proxy affect, yet never watch the original. In this way, our response and relationship to film viewing is produced by miniaturized units and compiled through the map provided by the podcasters and critics extending the cinematic simulacra (Baudrillard, 1983). If a "viewer" can tweet or understand a meme about a film they never saw due to the YouTube and podcast discussions they watched, then the referent has reached a heightened abstraction from time and space. Research leveraging interviews, surveys, and more audience-centered approaches could answer questions about why people listen to audio critics, what levels of enjoyment are gained, and how they interact with the film text in relation to the critic's content.

In conclusion to the first question of where audio critics contribute and how they can be classified within the media ecosystem; the response is twofold:

- Audio critics form interest groups called niches that provide listeners with a point of view for the analysis of the film. These niches can be used to identify the audio critic's position within the media ecosystem because they represent whom the critic attracts and how the critic orient itself in relation to the films.

- Audio critics contributed content outside of the podcasting space through channels like YouTube or in their organizations as staff content contributors. Audio critics have footprints across the media ecosystem where they contribute knowledge and material presence.

The niches and contributions of critics can be explored further for implications on if some niches have stronger tendencies to provide rhetorical analysis of film and help the audience develop critical consciousness and clear the path from theory to praxis. The critics also help their audiences engage with the symbolic interaction of a film to relate meaning in lived experiences. And they all present a question on what the ritual for film consumption means today as audiences can extend or even bypass their primary experience of a film through the audio critic discourse. Several paths of future research exist

because of the contributions to the field of knowledge from this study. First, more exploration on how the niches interact with attention to audience and reception theory and methods will contribute to the understanding of podcast communities. The connection and cross-over between visual and audio critics via YouTube essayists and podcast audio critics deserve attention. And there is grounding to warrant questions about the rhetorical strategies for analysis from the critics on a micro-level, rather than the meso-level. This study contributed knowledge about the potential field of audio criticism by looking at routines of behavior and group formations. The next study should look closely at the values, arguments, and judgments about films with cultural significance coming from audio critics to capture a snapshot of the discourse and contribute to collective memory studies. The next section reviews the discursive activities of audio critics that indicate the subfield by restating the routine behaviors observed across the sample.

5.2 How do the discursive activities of audio critics intersect with generic forms of film criticism?

To what extent do audio critics follow the legacy routines of film criticism?

Which discursive activities form a habitus for audio criticism as a media field of practice?

Audio critics intersect with the generic forms of film criticism by creating recognized genre events and prescribing to several tenets of film canon. Multiple genres and conventions identified in the literature for writing about film appeared in this sample, indicating that audio critics follow some legacy routines when reviewing film. Many of the hosts for these programs work in media-related fields, so the parallels to journalism and written review structures are logical. At the core, audio critics follow practices for writing about film (Corrigan, 2015), mirror evaluation types seen in traditional Schools of Criticism (McWhirter, 2016), and articulate evaluations and meaning from movies (Frey, 2015). They held conversations that were recognizable as genres of movie reviews with recommendations, critical reviews of the artistic mechanics and messages, screening reports to describe scenes to build conversation, and theoretical reviews to contextualize films within a culture. Audio critics also demonstrated activity not well-covered in the literature on written and traditional criticism by roasting the internal logic as the

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primary goal of the review, sharing news and culture updates, and ranking multiple texts related to a theme. The podcast medium and the community niche allow the audio critics to cover various topics related to their interest area within the same episode. Looking across their organizations and their audience niches, four activities appeared in common. The branded openings and sharing of first impressions help the potential audience find the audio critics in the fragmented and crowded podcast space to form their niche (Spinelli & Dann, 2018). The providing of a synopsis reflects a typical routine for a film review, extending a legacy practice to this emerging subfield (Corrigan, 2015). And the conversational outro bits exemplified the intimate nature of podcasts where listeners feel a part of the conversation rather than distant viewers (Swiatek, 2018). The combination of recognizable genre events and meso-level routines for the group point towards a field of practice with a forming habitus that can be identified and distinguished from other forms of criticism.

The critical apparatus for film grew out of long-standing traditions for artistic review: description, evaluation, and explanation (Frey, 2015; Giannetti, 2011). The apparatus criticus for texts and cultural artifacts has performed the function of informing the audience of the textual composition while instructing the reader about the textual traditions (Keeline, 2017). The tradition of criticism, stemming from the Enlightenment Era, sought to create and maintain artistic canons that would stand the test of time while informing cultural standards of significance (Benshoff, 2016). Professional critics were thought to possess expertise in film canon and elevate tastes to describe, evaluate, and explain a film through the critical apparatus beyond the pleasure-based judgments ascribed to non-experts (Debenedetti & Ghariani, 2018). The audio critics, as a subfield in the application of the apparatus criticus, regularly informed the reader about the text and function as thought-leaders for their fragmented niches. The work of the audio critics intersected with these legacy ideals and constructions of criticism while diverging into their own collective action and practice.

The audio critics demonstrated two styles in their discursive activities: traditional and storytellers. The traditional style brought pieces of information together for the audience to understand the art and didn't necessarily follow a sequential narrative in the flow of the conversation. The traditional style is just

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that, more traditionally expected in practice for reviewing and critiquing a text. The storytellers offered an emerging style not as recognized in the classic critical literature. The storyteller explains the sequence of the narrative to the listener, nearly scene by scene, while adding commentary on their experience or thoughts.

Storyteller: a style of review marked by sharing a detailed experience of the film in most or all its entirety. Storytellers can be identified by lengthy content that moves through the story beats, typically in order, while expanding on their thoughts and experiences at that moment. An audience listening to a storyteller may walk away knowing what exactly happened in the movie. This study features two storytellers: *Black Girl Film Club and Mostly Nitpicking.*

The style of the critic is best identified through long-term listening as completed in the methods for this study; however, two associations emerged around the storytellers that may help researchers and listeners classify their style more readily. This sample consistently demonstrated that the storytellers produced much lengthier episodes and tended towards the affective niche, which can be identified through the impressions and synopsis routines. More research into the categories of style and how to consistently predict the style of critic will enhance the understanding of the field. Regardless of the style, the critic followed in their discursive activities, eight genres and four routines emerged as consistent events the collective group enacted.

The eight genres represent the ways the critics acted within the structures of discourse (Fairclough, 2003). The topics and evaluations in their discourse created event structures recognizable as a particular way of acting, thus talking about a film. The eight event types, genres, for talking about film content were categorized based on the dominant way of acting through the course of the episode, even when conversations took turns into cross-genre interactions. A primary genre and a secondary genre were identified for each episode with relative ease, and by following the genre descriptions the framework could be leveraged, replicated, and expanded by researchers studying media ecosystems and discourses.

Table 16: Genres Defined

Event Type (Genre)	grouping of discursive interactions within social event
Screening Report	descriptions of shots and scenes to drive the primary discussions
Movie Review	summaries of plot and context with recommendations for audience
Theoretical Review	arguments about cinematic representation to explain complex socio-political structures
Critical Review	deconstruction of narrative and production choices to reveal nuance in cinematic storytelling
Logic Interrogation	interrogation of the internal logic structures and continuity in cinematic storytelling
News and Culture Review	providing updates and context on current events related to art and industry
Podcast Production Review	reflecting on the content and state of the podcast
Content Rank and Review	ranking sets of similar content or texts

Apart from creating content within the boundaries of discursive genres, the audio critics followed routines in their production that point towards a habitus. The habitus describes the functional activities that agents in a production system follow, outside of individual or organizational influences (Bourdieu, 1984; Shoemaker & Reese, 2014). The habitus is created and recognized through doxa, or the normalized activities of the profession or culture. Within the podcast profession and economy, activities for branding and identification may represent a doxa, or normalized activity, carried over from the work of radio DJs to distinguish their programming. The audio critics used music and vocally distinctive elements to open the episodes, which functions as identifiers for their audiences and welcomes listeners into the conversation among the marketspace for podcasts following the doxa of branding and identification (Spinelli & Dann, 2019). Each critic provided entry points into the conversation for its audience, creating knowledge bridges and fostering authenticity by offering first impressions of the film and a synopsis early in the episodes (Swiatek, 2018). Podcast hosts and listeners engage in an intimate practice as we listen in on conversations, often feeling a part of even when apart from the real space of discourse (Swaitek, 2018). The audio critics treated the end of episodes as if a live conversation with the audience had occurred by thanking and literally saying goodbye.

The emergence of meso-level routines of behavior, apart from the niche and the organizational influences, offers sites for continued study with audio critics constructed as a subfield rather than

divergent, individual actors in a technoculture. Asking questions about the institutional and social levels of influence that act on a field of practice will unlock more contributions on the state of film discourse. A study on the economics of the podcast space with attention to the critical subfield would be particularly useful as the sphere continues to formalize in market structure. Another research field that emerges from the discursive activities of audio critics in this sample is the consumptions paths and audience relationship to the genre events and discourses presented.

The literature on film consumption generally identifies two paths of interpretation among audiences, split between cognitive and affective approaches to film engagement. Cognitive approaches to film interpretation processes the complexities of the text; affective approaches refer to the experience of intense emotion from the text (Bartsch & Hartmann, 2017). Affective challenges are often constructed as a negative emotion, yet limiting the discussion of affective to the negative realm rejects the potential of an audience to oscillate between pleasure and discomfort (Williams, 2012). Deconstructing the relationship between both the intellectual processing of films and the sensational aspects of the experience can expose the cultural functions of film. Audio critics present vehicles for consumers to bridge an intellectual discussion with an emotional experience for films and film discourses. Podcasts are intimate bridging mediums partly because the emotional need can be met when a person is invited into the conversation because of the close relationship that language has provided in our sense of self, identity, and community (Hall, 1980/2012; Anderson, 2016). Written criticism maintains a one-way communication path with little invitation for the audience to connect as active in the community through printed works like screening reports, critical essays, and reviews (Corrigan, 2015). The audio critics actively invited the audience and included them in the conversation to varying degrees: *Show Me the Meaning* leveraged the live features on YouTube while calling out chat comments in their conversation and included voicemails from listeners. Additional research on the community aspects of live discourse, perhaps on YouTube and Clubhouse[43], can speak to the cognitive and affective aspects of audio criticism.

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[43] Clubhouse is a social media platform where participants have access only to audio and speak with each other in rooms. Hosts can form a club, perhaps a movie club, and speak directly with the community.

Another area of research that expands on the discursive practices of audio critics rests within the storyteller style to review narratives. Narratives enacted through technologies, like podcasts, provide alternative ways to experience the story without changing the basic construction and cognitive processing of the narrative itself (Bassett, 2007; Ryan, 2004). Audio critics can rescript films through the lens of their communities and perspectives, as observed in *Black Girl Film Club's* storytelling of movies with the goal to "analyze movies and the film industry from their unique, and often underrepresented, point of view." The conversations on a podcast, which represent intimate spaces between host and listener to form a niche community, produce new interpretations of social reality around the film (De Fina & Georgakopoulou, 2008). In addition, the storytellers can re-script cultural narratives and need not maintain the traditionally proscribed structure of logical beginning, middle, and end (De Fina & Georgakopoulou, 2008). Instead, the re-scripting process can produce narratives that transcend the structures of traditional experience through multilinear and hypertextual approaches (Thoss, Ensslin & Ciccoricco, 2018). *Mostly Nitpicking* jumped across topics as the hosts interpreted the film in multilinear ways. And the technological infrastructure of podcasts allows for the multilinear and hypertextual approach to a conversation. The listener's ability to control the speed of the audio, skip ahead or back in time, and select specific time-stamps within the story integrate "unnatural" approaches to storytelling. A study that asks about the audience experience in this unnatural storytelling or one that asks the hosts to expand on their sense of interpretation would extend the rescripting experience in audio criticism.

To conclude, audio critics aligned their discursive activities at the collective level, demonstrating a distinct subfield of criticism. The subfield followed several traditional routines and genres from legacy criticism, creating a way of being that reflects the parent function of evaluating and contextualizing film for audiences. The audio critics followed routines influenced by the institution of podcasting as well by branding their content, offering first impressions, and fostering intimacy and conversational behaviors. The genre events and the routines operated beyond the organizational and niche influences, suggesting a habitus that structures the audio critics at a higher level of influence. Within each podcast, the individual hosts approached and completed the routines in slightly different ways that show some creative autonomy

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still in the space. Further research on individual cases can explore particular texts across many audio critic samples to better unpack, clarify, and extend how influences like the organization or audience niche relate to the forms of discourse published. A study with interviews from audio critics on this subject would also produce insight into the individual routines and how hosts interact with the expectation of the audio critic (the podcast) and the organizations they belong to or built. And lastly, the discursive activities in this sample did not appear heavily influenced by economic ties; however, as the field continues to formalize, added research on advertising, sponsorships, and metrics of financial viability and success should follow. In the end, audio critics deserve their own construction as distinct within the field of criticism because they mirrored and extended familiar activities while being recognizable as unique from the written form.

5.3 How do audio critics engender social relations to form interpretive communities around their podcasts?

How does the infrastructure of communication technologies influence the discourse within the audience communities?
How do organizational factors visibly influence the individual routines of audio critics?
How does the fiscal dynamic between audio critics and audience visibly influence the discourse?

The ethnographic approach in this project allowed me to observe the audio critics and their communities as both structured researcher and participant. Over the five weeks of observation, 55 hours of content, and 200 tweets—in addition to emergent forums of community and discourse—I recognized three opportunities for audio critics to engender social relations and form their communities. The audio critics provided interest groups with their point of view for conversation in the form of niches. The niche of the critic can be identified through their branding, first impressions, and synopsis: all activities routinely in the first 1/3 of the episode. Over a few episodes, the interest group of the audio critic is clear to identify. The audio critics also integrated conversational strategies into their podcasts to engender relationships between host and listener while building authenticity, trust, and intimacy (Swiatek, 2018). They greeted and said goodbye to listeners, fostering a feeling of being part of their discussion. And last, the audio critics provided forums for audience interaction and engagement. Some critics leveraged more technological affordances of their platforms by giving the audience a live streamed experience to chat in

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real-time or by integrating voicemails into the audio file. Other critics used platforms like Patreon to give

more engaged, as measured by financial contributions, community members added content and access to

influence the discourse via polls and hangouts. And all the audio critics offered prompts and space on

Twitter for the community to connect; however, the audio critics did very little interaction or moderation

of the forums. The individual hosts appeared more active in the communities than the critic brand

accounts, which sparks research questions on the individual level of influence and analysis rather than the

collective, meso-level of audio critics in this study.

First, the audience who the audio critics must imagine and build relationships around are

influenced by structures that set a path towards podcast selection. While audiences are thought to have

more control over media consumption with our fragmented market, the fragmented and hyper-specialized

products are put in their path by algorithms and cultural associations towards taste. For example, listeners

of other National Public Radio programs, who are imagined and surveyed to be richer, whiter, and more

educated overall, are also more likely to listen to *Pop Culture Happy Hour* because Spotify will

recommend it as a program and NPR cross-promotes its products. NPR also is more likely accessible and

recommended within the upper-middle taste culture that aligns with more educated and white-collar

professionals (Gans, 1999). The same holds for listeners of The Ringer Network, and represents a core

benefit of belonging to a network of podcasts: marketing and referential power (Heeremans, 2018;

Sullivan, 2018). Other listeners might find their way into the podcast community through channels like

YouTube with Wisecrack's pop culture video essays recommended from television, film, and video game

content that intersects with review and essays through a lower-middle class taste culture. YouTube

dominates the social media market space for the 30-64 demographic and those making 30k-50k with

another spike above 75k to align with access for that taste public (Auxier & Anderson, 2021). Once

engaged with Wisecrack on YouTube, the jump to *Show Me the Meaning* is not far as they cross-promote

products. Additionally on YouTube, *Mostly Nitpicking* might be linked, via algorithm, to Wisecrack and

the proliferation of NandoVMovies that is operated by a *Mostly Nitpicking* host. And lastly, movie fans

seeking particular viewpoints, such as *Black Girl Film Club*, need only to Google "Black movie podcasts"

to find articles and lists with options including that sampled in this study. The point here is that the audiences are on a path to find the audio critic with the niche, style, and perspective that resonates based on the network of media discourse and the contributions of the audio critics to that network as aligned with the taste culture and public.

The contributions of the audio critic do depend to an extent on the organizational structure they operate within. The organization that the audio critic belongs to held some influence on their production routines and content. The case studies represented legacy-backed organizations, i.e., *Pop Culture Happy Hour* and *The Big Picture*, with formalized networks of resources. *Pop Culture Happy Hour* produced shorter, daily episodes that could neatly fit into a 30-minute radio broadcast window, while *The Big Picture* interviewed directors and actors because its parent, The Ringer Network, has the resources and connections to secure that type of content. While *Show Me the Meaning* leans heavily into viewer participation from its crowd-backed roots, it does answer to a larger network of content with sponsorship deals and standards to maintain. *Show Me the Meaning* is crowd-backed because its network is YouTube-based and began through viewership support rather than ties to journalism. It produced content around the same 60-minute mark with regular advertising breaks for its sponsored content. The large crowd-backed network presents sites for continued research on how the aspirational labor of content creators transforms into networked content with structured advertising deals and even buyout from established production companies (Heeremans, 2018; Sullivan, 2018).

The study also represented crowd-backed organizations without larger structures directly overseeing their work that generated different influences on their routines and style of review. *Mostly Nitpicking* could offer very long episodes that span many diverging topics because it doesn't have sponsorships or oversight from a professional organization with work-place expectations. Instead, *Mostly Nitpicking* is a group of friends talking about anything related to the movie under review. And *Black Girl Film Club* produced the fewest episodes and even skipped the Wonder Woman 1984 release as it doesn't have an organization influencing its content with routines of gatewatching for what films will draw the most audience to its content and dominate the discourse (Bruns, 2008). It was more relaxed, like a book

club with peers that explores a variety of topics with shared purpose but not so far as a work structure dynamic. It selected older or more obscure films to discuss with far more individual influence on the selections, like *Mostly Nitpicking.* The organization, and by extension the potential advertising contracts, held influence on the audio critics in their production routines and the types of films they covered.

Within the organization, the case study analysis also found four distinct critical niches that influenced the entry points for discourse. The critical niche represents the interest group and point of view that the audio critic presents for their community. The niches, and the communities attracted to these niches, relate to taste publics connected to the pathways of discovery and the access they have (Gans, 1999). Notably, those in the legacy-backed organizations with positions and access closer to the creators of culture rest in high culture spaces and niches aligned with more artistic and creator-oriented discourses. *The Big Picture* interviews the writers and directors of film while consistently looking at film from the creator perspective to deliver the audience its niche of technical discourse. *The Big Picture* also displayed the least amount of audience engagement, and even put forth explicit disdain for mass culture and online fandoms. The tendency to interview auteurs and the distant relationship it builds with the listeners demonstrates a perceived role in supplying "proper" culture to the masses. While public-facing metrics are not formalized for the podcast industry, the 3,000+ Apple Reviews and 4 Star rating suggests that it has a segment of people who desire and aspire to be in a high culture group. That segment is reinforced by the sponsorships of *The Big Picture* grounded in semi-luxury brands and disposable income products that suggest conspicuous consumption such as things that require batteries (consumer electronics) and brand-new cars to take road trips in while paying for entertainment with Spotify.

The canonical niche as occupied by *Pop Culture Happy Hour* suggests an upper-middle cultural taste with executives and well-educated audiences. The demographics of National Public Radio and the advertisers for *Pop Culture Happy Hour* reflect the qualities of upper-middle cultural taste with products that help with white-collar work and books to read for leisure and personal growth. The upper-middle culture critic would focus more-so on recommendations to help the audience determine among cultural products while still sincerely engaging with mass culture and reviewing what Hollywood creates (Gans,

1999). The lower-middle taste culture explains and predicts the audience attracted to the interpretive niche of audio critic discourse. The lower-middle culture is described by Gans (1999) as growing in sophistication and focused on "making substance more intelligible and gratifying" (p. 111). A shift from the past 20 years when Gans explicated the five taste cultures is the appearance that the lower-middle is uninterested in how society works compared to the values of the culture. Based on the active engagement, from writing emails to leaving voicemails, the audience for the interpretative niche and likely found through their lower-middle culture pathways is interested in engaging with theoretical arguments about film representation and society. And finally, the affective niche is likely reached through the lower-middle and the low culture of taste with products pointing towards action and adventure. Again, the past 20 years has inevitably shifted culture and the affective niche of discourse does not mean the audience completely rejects forms of art and substance. Still, the affective niche is most concerned with an experience through the film, which is most likely discovered through the products, pathways, and preferences of low taste publics and those entrenched in contradicting cultural products.

These niches guided the content produced, from the first impressions to the types of synopses and throughout the topics of conversations. The interpretative niche, which grounds interpretations of a text to be accessible reflected a very contextual approach to review. *Show Me the Meaning* and *Black Girl Film Club* provided first impressions that set up these interpretations and contextualized their experiences of the film within social frameworks. Their critical niche guided the discourses into more thematic analyses and opportunities for their listeners to grow and learn. *Pop Culture Happy Hour* existed within a canonical niche as it took a classic approach to film review by setting up the audience for non-spoiler reviews with more focus on the artistic qualities and mechanics of narrative storytelling. The episodes were consistently less than 30 minutes with highly structured conversations that ultimately helped the audience decide if they wanted to engage further with the film and understand the narrative better. Additionally, the legacy-backed, canonical niche of *Pop Culture Happy Hour* plays on public radio to attract, or at least be distributed to, wider audiences looking for general recommendations without the intensity of interaction that goes along with seeking out content on a podcast feed.

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The Big Picture was the most focused on the industry as it facilitated a technical niche that consistently elevated the practices and agents in film production and the Hollywood industry. It typically turned the conversations towards the director's contributions, the actors' performances, and the business of filmmaking while the organization allowed it to pull in interviews with agents of the industry. It exists within a high culture taste framework that elevates the creators of art and culture. When *The Big Picture* did not elevate and celebrate a film and genre, as seen with <u>Wonder Woman 1984</u>, its community rejected the divergence from the niche. The feedback loop showed a tension between the critical taste culture that prefers auteur and fine cinema—the taste of *The Big Picture*—and the encroaching mass culture products that they need to cover for market share reasons. The tent-pole action films, which were formally considered within low taste culture, now dominate production in Hollywood and film reviewers with advertisers to please receive pressure from the market to cover these films, even if it doesn't align directly with their tastes. Advertisers and mass consumption patterns represent key influencers on the content and routines within media sociology (Shoemaker & Reese, 2014). The response from *The Big Picture* was more mocking of the low culture product (<u>Wonder Woman 1984</u>) followed by dismissal of the "online discourse" about critiques to the film. Then select audience members produced visible feedback in the loop with sentiments that *The Big Picture* is condescending towards other taste publics.

And last, *Mostly Nitpicking* was extremely fun and funny as they offered an affective niche to talk the listeners through a very personal telling of the thoughts and experiences with the movies. Their runtimes were "5-Star" and well over two hours, yet the community it found was in on the joke and here for the journey. The feedback loop revealed an engaged community of listeners who posted memes and even made a chart about the run-time of the show. The audience looking for an affective experience may reach audio critics such as *Mostly Nitpicking* through their access pathways from YouTube channels like CinemaSins, creators who sin the details and plotholes of movies, when NandoVMovies relates to that vein of video and pop culture content. Within NandoVMovies, Nando consistently promotes the podcast. The affective niche and taste public might also get to this content through reading lighter pop culture fair on thepopbreak.com where the other hosts write or by listening to reality content like *Roses &*

Rejections—about the Bachelor franchise, which another *Mostly Nitpicking* host creates. The taste culture surrounding an affective niche of discourse could be considered low for the emphasis on entertainment, and audio critics like *Mostly Nitpicking* serve entertaining discourse with cultural and political commentary sprinkled within.

Each case displayed its own personality and aligned within a taste culture, which reflects the theory on taste production social fragmentation. The field of production is embedded within competition among creators to provide products that meet demand while targeting unique markets (Bourdieu, 1984; Schudson, 2011). Audio critics operating within the subfield of criticism must navigate the competition and distinguish their niche to find an audience and market share, even when operating within an aspirational labor framework. Competitors within a field rely on existing tastes while co-creating further fragmented communities based on the relationship they form with the consumer (Bourdieu, 1984). For these audio critics, the discursive niche they present to their listeners represents the co-created taste with the rating for their podcasts and feedback loops of engagement providing the legitimizing structure for the product. Basically, the podcasts must find ways to tap into and then sustain cultures of taste and systems of audience engagement to produce meaningful labor and contribute to the ecosystems of media consumption and discussion. Once the niche of discourse, the general taste culture, is established the audio critics perform actions for maintaining a particular social relationship with the audience as prescribed by the organization and doxa of their position in the critical field.

Audio critics existing further from the doxa of professional journalism, which remains largely rooted in one-directional communication flowing from the journalists and newspapers towards the audience (Schudson, 2011; Shoemaker & Reese, 2014), reflected more routines to form closer connections with the listeners. The crowd-backed critics displayed similar strategies for audience formation and maintenance as found with micro-celebrities on Twitter and YouTube. The micro-celebrity strategies for audience engagement and community building reflect intimacy and authenticity building techniques (Marshall, 2013; McRae, 2017). During the conversation, the hosts talked about their families—such as DJ from *Mostly Nitpicking* was married in 2020—or their views on COVID-19 and

impacts on their life: many talked about missing movie theaters or the COVID-19 situation where they live (i.e., Australia, L.A., Philadelphia, Washington D.C.). Over the course of the sample, I got to know more about each of the hosts that form the audio critic program; however, the concept of the podcast (the audio critic) as the primary interactant in the dynamic remained. The individual hosts make the show yet the podcast itself if the reference in mind when I think, "I can't wait to listen to X." The individual hosts also rotated while maintaining a consistent show experience for the audience. The audience feedback loop suggests that the hosts are critical to the success of the show and replaceable compared to preserve the audio critic brand: many audio critics had reviews from their audience indicating a desire for different hosts or pointing out what was disliked about a particular individual. An intimacy between myself and the crowd-backed audio critics formed over time as I grew awareness of the inside jokes and how the critics interacted with the audience. That intimacy was less strong with the legacy-backed audio critics who did less of the authenticity and community building work given the established culture and audiences they tap into with their overarching networks of listenership. Podcasting, while audiences can select single episodes based on topics they have interest in, presents a strong intimate bridging medium and connecting experience when we experience repetition and build familiarity with their styles and work (Hancock & McMurtry, 2018; Spinelli & Dann, 2019; Swiatek, 2018). Beyond the influence of propinquity in forming social relations with a community of listeners, the audio critics enacted routines of conversation with the audience aligned with the backing and taste they produce content within.

When they ended their programs, all the critics offered forms of "goodbye" and appreciation for listening, which is a common practice in the vlogging age and carried over from the doxa of radio DJ's forming a connection and reinforcing their brand (Hilmes, 2014). The practice of a consistent and interpersonally-linked sign-off is present across mediums of vloggers on YouTube and influencers building audience engagement. Many micro-celebrities in intimate digital spaces treat their imagined communities as real by literally telling us goodbye when a conversation ends. But the crowd-backed audio critics presented more interpersonal work by signing off in more intimate ways. For example, the *Show Me the Meaning* sign-off occurred after the mailbag segment where the audience is actively

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included in the content and reinforced a call to action for us to write or call in. Then the hosts said

goodbye with a bit of flair and wit related to the themes of that episode. The other crowd-backed audio

critics presented similar casualness and invitations for the audience to connect. The legacy-backed critics

either didn't typically invite the audience to connect (*The Big Picture*) or asked for comments on the

social media forums without indication or evidence of the audience comments being used or considered in

the discourse (*Pop Culture Happy Hour*). The more professional journalists followed a routine of

acknowledging the audience while presenting the episodes as products rather than as connections among

critic and audience. Additional research on the conversational strategies within podcasts couched in

interpersonal communication and computer-mediated communication research would provide insights on

how social relationships are managed by podcast micro-celebrities.

The final strategy demonstrated by the audio critics to engender social relationships and form

community was by providing forums of interaction and discussion for their audiences. The effectiveness

and extent that the forum infrastructure provided depends on the outside structures that guide the audience

towards these niches and podcasts. On the crowd-backed end of the spectrum, these forums of interaction

encouraged participatory culture among their niche communities. Participatory culture refers to the

convergence of consumers and producers through the creating, remixing, and sharing of cultural texts

applied to user-generated content, which challenges the legitimacy of legacy critics for cinema as fans and

"regular" viewers contribute to the public discourse mass consumed and material ways (Jenkins,

2003/2012). The audio critics from legacy-backed organizations with closer roots to institutional authority

over film and proximity to elitist-canon of criticism did not engage as fully in the potential for

participatory culture. Rather the doxa of professional journalism paired with the high culture and upper-

middle cultures of taste for *The Big Picture* and *Pop Culture Happy Hour* set a path where the audio

critics exist to explain, elevate, and recommend culture to the audience as sites of authority and

gatekeeping on the conversation (Gans, 1999; Schudson, 2011; Shoemaker & Reese, 2014). These critics

tended to create a forum without following up or integrating that forum content into the critical

discourses. Critics coming from crowd-backed spaces tended to read emails, play listener voicemails, and

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interact with their community on the forums they created. A stronger value on the tastes and abilities of the audience exists in the crowd-backed and lower cultures for audio critics forming interpretive and affective niches of discourse. The extent and manifestation of participatory culture through audio critics— both within their communities and as a lens to explore audio criticism as a field—presents many avenues for scholarship to further situate the podcaster's work.

The forums of interaction created by the audio critics for their communities resided largely on Twitter. This research focused on Twitter as the primary social media tool across the sample to align with previous work on podcast from Spinelli and Dann (2019); however other social media platforms were observed when the critics brought them to the audience's attention. For example, *Black Girl Film Club* is active on Instagram while *Show Me the Meaning* leveraged YouTube structures. The use of additional streams to engage with the audience and form more active social relations between critic and audience occurred more often with the crowd-backed podcasts rather than the legacy-backed organizations. Again, the more one-way routines and relative heightened authority and status of the cultural journalists lingers in the lack of interaction between the legacy-backed *The Big Picture* and *Pop Culture Happy Hour* compared to their counter-parts. The lack of active engagement follows theory on journalist consideration and value of commenters on news items with more traditional professionals viewing the mass public as threats to the legitimacy of criticism and those operating within the converger philosophy supporting and encouraging active participation in the discourse from the public of consumers (Wolfgang, McConnel; & Blackburn, 2020). Those closer to the doxa of professional journalism view the audience as less qualified and worthy of elevating their discourse on film while those further from the profession view the audience as valuable aspects in the creation of discourse as evidenced by the active inclusion of audience content.

The sample included 204 tweets from the official podcast handles between November 29, 2020, and January 4, 2021. While the sample was smaller than Spinelli and Dann's analyses of 500 tweets from 10 podcasts (5,000 tweets), the patterns of interaction and functions of Twitter are consistent with their findings: "they did not approach its [social media] use in a highly coordinated or premeditated fashion" (p. 49). This study did not include interviews to speak on the premeditated notion of the social mix, yet

the tweets patterns did not demonstrate content pillars, frequency, or the consistency of best practices for social media strategies (Freberg, 2019). The sample ranged from 50 to 32 Tweets per week, with the function of the tweets that week fluctuating. While experiencing the feeds, I never knew if I would see tweets or not. The primary pattern in terms of posting was the use of retweeted content. Spinelli and Dann also found retweeting as a consistent way for podcasters to generate content on their feeds. In my sample, 38% of all the content was a retweet, and every case participated in retweeting content.

Table 17: Twitter Functions Defined

Publicity	marketing for new episodes
Merchandising	marketing of events or items to buy
Show Topics	reference to elements of the show/episodes
Engagement	call or response for audience participation
Audience Interaction	response to audience content
Customer Service	answering technical issues related to podcast
Recommendation	steering audience towards content
General	functions not related to audio criticism

Publicity, defined as marketing for new episodes, made up 34% of the sample here, and forms of publicity or marketing were routinely observed for Spinelli and Dann. Audience interaction was the next highest proportion at 19% of the sample, and the content was split between original posts replying to another tweet and a simple retweet of that content. The audience interactions reflect some skew due to the time of the year for this sample: Spotify released the Yearly Wrap Up and NPR had a donation push. Most of the audience interactions as original content from the accounts were responses of gratitude for supporting the podcasts through listening posts or donation announcements.

Table 18: Twitter Data by Function

Row Labels	Count of Account
Audience Interaction	19%
Customer Service	0%
Engagement	4%
General	12%
Merchandising	2%
Publicity	34%
Recommendation	11%
Show Topics	17%
Grand Total	**100.00%**

Twitter was used for engagement with the audience, defined as a call for response and audience participation. While small in quantity, this function of Twitter accounted for over 1/3 of the replies on all the tweets, demonstrating the willingness of the communities to engage when presented a prompt. The most active threads of engagement posts asked the communities to share their favorite films within a prompted genre or time frame. *The Big Picture* asked the audience to share their favorite action films, George Clooney films, 2020 films, and Christmas movies, all with far above average replies compared to other tweet types.[44] Not many cases used this discursively rich function: actually, @thebigpic was nearly the only case to do so. Despite asking for engagement and tweeting about show topics, very little of the Twitter community interactions made their way into the podcast discourse. Overall, the critics, particularly those from legacy-backed organizations, tended to acknowledge the existence of the audience but did not make the audience a true part of or influence on the discourse. Instead, the audience community created its own meta-discourse on the critics as posted to the public forum with very little follow-up or engagement from critics nor the larger community.

The level of engagement towards the audience can be considered through the theory of slacktivism in social media activism literature. Slacktivism, the combination of "slacker" and "activism," refers to a pattern of watching or liking the content and pages of social movements as a substitution for active forms of civic participation (Glen, 2015). In this case, retweeting, a low-effort function afforded by Twitter, offers a substitute for more active forms of community participation. The critic needs to click on two buttons and can bypass decisions about what to type when retweeting content, a process that can be completed in seconds. Slacktivism can satisfy the moral or psychological demands for engagement as "token displays of support" with minimal effort (Lane & Dal Cin, 2018, 1524). An extension of slacktivism may be at play when audio critics perceive the cultural capital of being elevated via a retweet or like to valuable enough for the audience to meet their social demands for recognition, thus fostering a

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[44] Many of the heavily engaged tweets were retweeted content from @ringer, *The Big Picture's* parent network with a far larger audience of 523k followers. Retweeted content may have brought additional audience segments into the interaction or boosted the content in the Twitter algorithm, producing higher interaction rates.

relationship. I did not see visible reactions to the communal value of retweeting, and the token displays of community support can be a focal point of future research. While not formally categorized, my fieldnotes reflected a strong theme that individual podcast hosts interacted with the audience far more than the podcast brand account, which is consistent with Spinelli and Dann as well. Future research could focus on the individual analysis of hosts to compare to the meso-level analysis of audio critic interactions as a collective from this study.

A final frontier for future research based on observations of the social relationships and dynamics of audio critics reflects the live stream as a forum for audience participation. Live streams were observed in two ways, and each intersects with the fiscal dynamics of the audio critics and their communities. The first way was the live stream on YouTube, where the audience could watch the conversation among their micro-celebrity hosts in real-time. *Show Me the Meaning* leveraged this technology and allowed the community to comment in the live chat. At times, it even acknowledged or called out comments in the chat, actively including the audience in the discourse. While accessing the live streams, the audience had the opportunity to donate money directly to the critics. The other opportunity for live streams with the audience was through Patreon, which provides exclusive access to the patrons who pay the audio critic at tier levels. *The Show Me the Meaning* hosts participated in various Patreon Hang-Outs with their other Wisecrack network contributors. *Mostly Nitpicking's* community could pay for host Nando's Patreon and receive access to monthly live streams about film and media topics. Each of the Patreon experiences connects to parallel content beyond strictly the audio critic; however, the community received cross-promotional content and may be many of the same people in each space. Overall, the crowd-backed audio critics integrated the audience far more into the experience than the legacy-backed critics. The fiscal dynamic between audio critics within well-established and legacy structures is more distant to their audience as they treat them through a less intimate and more broadcast-type of construction. The advertising spots were less personalized and reflected routines of the one-directional and impersonal broadcast radio or television arena. The crowd-backed critics treated the audience as more active participants and individuals by including them in live streams and even offering sponsored content with

the host reading and interjecting personal recommendations or thoughts about the products for the audience. Future research on these dynamics between networked and established critics compared to crowd-backed would produce insights into how participatory culture and audience relationships form under differing economic influences.

In conclusion, the audio critics engendered social relations to form communities by consistently speaking through a point of view for their niche and providing forums for community interactions. The social relations were set in motion by outside structures that guided the audience's selection and awareness of these audio critics based on previous taste and algorithms. The critical niches represent a through-line in how social relationships formed and what type of audience engagement was present. The interpretative niches tended to participate with the audience more than others. In addition, the legacy-backed critics with roots to professional journalism and broadcasting routines tended to integrate and build social relations with their audiences the least. Instead, they engendered support through their institutional legitimacy as micro-celebrities. Within the conversations, all the critics practiced forms of micro-celebrity maintenance by sharing insight into the personal lives of the hosts and providing authentic first impressions of a film. The critics then signed off the episodes with goodbyes that indicate the end of interpersonal interaction, signaling some of the intimacy shared between podcast host and listener. The critics tended to create a public forum but did not demonstrate the frequency in moderating the conversations nor integrating the forum into their podcast discourses, however. The public forums did provide spaces for the community to interact with each other, and threads of discourse among listeners appeared at times. Some critics, particularly those from crowd-backed and interpretive niches, did include material from the public forum directly into the podcasts via live chats, voicemail submissions, and emails. Overall, future studies with a scope limited to exploring the persona work of the audio critics and the interactions of the individual hosts within their communities would provide further insight into the niches contributed by this study. Another study on just the live stream function of audio criticism, as seen in this project, also presents a site for theory-building around participatory culture and media criticism.

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5.4 Dissertation Summary

This project contributes to the knowledge fields of podcast cultures and film discourses by presenting evidence of a subfield for film criticism distributed through audio mediums. The project drew from the literature on audience expectations around participation with entertainment, journalism, and public deliberation (Jenkins, 2003/2012; Keeline, 2017; Macnamara, 2010; Singer, 2010; Warner, 2002) to enter a conversation about film discourses as an intersection point between canons of criticism and active participation from wider audiences (Frey, 2015). This study examined five podcasts that represented actors in film reviews using audio and social media technology to participate in discourse (Jenkins, 2003/2012; Singer, 2008). The podcasts were called audio critics, as the branded entity that listeners of podcasts can subscribe to follow. The audio critics were produced by hosts, who represent the individual aspects of film review. This study focused on the meso-level, or the group collective, actions performed by the audio critics that make up podcasting culture. Podcast culture continues to emerge as a formalized industry, and this study directly responds to the call for research from edited works on podcast culture, Llinares, Fox, and Berry (2018) and Spinelli & Dann (2019), to provide case study analyses on podcasts within industry realms to build foundations for specialized and focused questions moving forward. This dissertation project examined the podcasts within film criticism, an industry realm under-discussed in podcast research (Bottomley, 2015), and presents future research topics and questions to extend the findings here. This research on audio critics complements the existing literature on podcasting for education (Drew, 2017), for organizational communication (Waters et. al, 2011), and in science contexts (Mackenzie, 2019). Overall, audio critics followed classifiable and recognizable routines when reviewing films that situate them as a subfield of practice within film criticism. The four niches, the eight genres, and the activities of audience interaction all offer foundations to understand the practices of podcasts in critical realms and how participatory culture can manifest moving forward with emerging technological infrastructures. The growing networks of audio critics present an emerging cultural economy that can sustain a career's worth of research and enlightenment on the media ecosystem.

Listening to stories, conversations, and thoughts provide people with a powerful mechanism to connect and process experiences, which podcasts contribute to the media ecosystem. The steep rise of podcasts in popular culture demonstrates the symbolic need for storytelling: the everyday desire to hear cultural reactions and produce information (Bassett, 2007). Podcasts are receiving intellectual examination for the textual elements in the discourse because of their ability to bridge communities through meaning-making and social interpretations of life events or interest groups (De Fina & Georgakopoulou, 2008; Fairclough, 2003; Swiatek, 2018). Media scholars have a call to action to illuminate the political, cultural, or commercial influences of industries within the ecosystem through integrated analysis of text, audience feedback, histories, and larger cultural implications (Holt & Perren, 2011). Podcast culture is undergoing formalization processes that generate structures with economic, organizational, political, and cultural influence on the production, distribution, and nature of the content (Hilmes, 2013; Sullivan, 2018). Likewise, Cinema criticism has undergone shifts in who and what are considered a form of criticism, presenting justification to closely examine audio critics (Frey, 2015). This project connected those dots with attention to the power of storytelling and presented findings that audio critics:

- contribute to the ecosystem of media by offering niches of discourse that extend the rituals of film consumption. Audiences can engage with films through the interest area of discourse to hear canonical, technical, interpretative, and affective perspectives on film analysis. The niches of discourse reinforce the taste cultures and describe the content produced for fragmented taste publics within the framework of subcultural programming.

- demonstrate a subfield of film criticism that follows the central premise of evaluating and contextualizing films within a culture for audiences. The audio critics followed some genres and routines of legacy criticism while adding news ways to review film and media content in line with the medium they produce discourse in.

- provide public forums for audiences to participate in culture and discussion. Audio critics more aligned to crowd-backing tended to involve the audience in the active discourse by

allowing for live streams and real-time chats or inserting listener emails and voicemails into the episodes.

Audio critics are situated within a flattening hierarchy and diminishing social symbolism between professional and amateur critics. Audiences are no longer beholden to printed weeklies and columns from the newspaper's critic desk to learn about and guide interpretation on a film: Twitter, blogs, podcasts, and YouTube increase the supply of film reviews without the structural limitations—from organizational policy to page space—associated with print (James, 2015). Audiences also have opportunities, though mediated by the algorithms that weigh their past choices, to engage with the type of discourse and criticism they desire and which aligns with their taste culture (Gans, 1999). The ability to argue audio critics as legitimate participants of film criticism rests on the changing reality of criticism as a field. Frey and Sayad (2015) edited an exploration on the interlocking debates of the field for film discourse with each contribution contemplating "at least one, if not all five, of these questions and their relationship to film criticism" (p. 2). Each debate front contributes to the opening for audio critics to be considered as a legitimate subfield providing criticism of movies. I summarize the fronts and how the genres of criticism observed intersect for context on the contribution of this research project.

1. The first front is an ontological debate on criticism: what is the reality and thus purpose of criticism? Some argue the purpose rests in educating or articulating hidden meaning in the text, or in creating a dialogue with the audience, or perhaps contextualizing the work in society, while others posit the function should aim to evaluate with reason. Audio critics reflected all these purposes with folks from *Show Me the Meaning* articulating philosophical meaning while creating a dialogue with listeners via live chats and voicemails, *The Big Picture* contextualizing texts within society and the film industries, *Pop Culture Happy Hour* evaluating artistic and cinematic elements, and *Mostly Nitpicking* and *Black Girl Film Club* doing a bit of everything as they describe the film in their retellings. The growing popularity of podcasts—and visual criticism on YouTube—and the purposes that each critical niche serves for the audience must be considered in the new nature of reality for film criticism.

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2. The second front argues about the nature of the relationship between critic and audience. Traditional views of criticism place the critic as an authority figure to guide engaged audiences towards artistic enlightenment and higher tastes. The age of unaffiliated critics challenged the position that professional, legacy-affiliated critics are better than a layperson at discussing film value and articulating sentiment to an audience. *Show Me the Meaning* exemplifies the challenge to the debate on critic and audience relationship as it 1) demonstrates strong ability to provide high-level explanation and assessment on films without legacy affiliations to culture journalism or academic ties and 2) readily incorporates the thoughts and ideas of the "laypeople" in the audience to enhance the discourse. Podcast culture engenders the formation of niches, or interest groups, for audiences seeking out a particular relationship. The relationships provide differing value to the segmented audience and contribute value within the ecosystem of film discourse. The question of a professional hierarchy within audio criticism, if one podcast is higher quality than another or possesses more authority on the topic, is certainly viable for future research on a larger scale sample and through methods focused on rhetorical assessments of the discourse.

3. The third debate confronts how the activity and form of criticism have changed since the early 2000s. The landscape of film discourse exploded from singular access points of information (i.e., critic column in a paper or dedicated television programming) to a hyper fragmented stream of content available on demand. The audio critics lean into these new activity forms beyond the inherent on-demand nature of podcasting: for example, *Show Me the Meaning* and *Mostly Nitpicking* offer added, parallel content through Patreon and YouTube or *Pop Culture Happy Hour* sends a newsletter filled with links to related film and media information. *Black Girl Film Club* hosts use Letterboxd to continue the film review experience in new mediums for the audience. The activities of criticism have been argued as running shorter and dumber than in the past; however, the audio critics displayed an understanding of the audience and consumptions behaviors with sophistication while producing long-form content. Again, arguments about the 'dumbness' or intellectual level of audio criticism need to be reserved until further analysis on the

particulars of discourse are conducted. In this study, while focused on the collective activities, the ethnographic process allowed me to experience the types of conversations they had. I experienced intellectual and thoughtful moments from every critic, even if couched in casual, less serious format. As the activity and format for criticism is debated, the audio formats and activities must be reconciled within the definition.

4. The fourth debate focuses on film criticism as a profession and institution. The decrease in staffing and general market value of many newspapers sparked the debate on the status of cultural journalists, who were thought of as the affiliated authority in film criticism. The unaffiliated sphere of critics has destabilized the business model for criticism and information with some "amateur" critics producing income on their labor and others performing aspirational labor that impacts, and potentially draws audience away from, affiliated critic spaces. The sample included affiliated critics who incorporated traditional advertising routines (*The Big Picture* and *Pop Culture Happy Hour*) that juxtaposed the self-and unaffiliated critics who incorporated more intimate sponsorships (*Show Me the Meaning*), crowd-funding (*Show Me the Meaning* and *Mostly Nitpicking*) or silent sponsors (*Black Girl Film Club*). As the debate on the boundaries of professionalism in criticism continues, the formalization of podcast networks and production culture must be considered as well. Audio critics followed institutional routines, indicating a professional field, and are attracting funders for viable revenue streams. The subfield is formalizing alongside the transition of critical practice at large.

5. The final front for current debates in film criticism asks who a critic can be and if criticism has become more democratic. The evidence from this project points towards a professional (and thus successful) habitus of audio criticism, meaning those who follow those routines should be considered within the boundaries of the professional subfield of practice. Additionally, the subfield followed genres and activities of the larger critical habitus, indicating they can be considered critics. The debate on if criticism is becoming too democratic and accessible risks minimizing the importance of the other four fronts. While most anyone can record a podcast,

audio critics do need to complete the labor of creating dialog and preparing forms of evaluation (Front #1), identifying and maintaining their niche and forming relationships with the audience (Front #2), conducting activities of production that can be recognized within the field (Front #3), and following the routines and genres within the apparatus criticus (Front #4). With those debates in mind and further exploration on audio critics, a boundary could be identified between who participates in criticism as a *critic* and who participates in criticism as an *audience* or *group of practice*.

The status of the critic is no longer bound by a high-brow practice defined through written articulation grounded in artistic canon and backed by the prestige economy attributed to legacy institutions. In the digital age, a democratized market of entertainment value and niche interpretive communities opens the door for emergent critics—using audiovisuals to entertain while interpreting films—to gain legitimacy and impact the social discourse. The audio critics contributed to the discourse through the four niches, eight genres, and several activities of audience interaction. The five very different cases in terms of followers, demographics, and organizational affiliation demonstrated such striking similarities in their practices that collective activities emerged, representing a forming habitus. The evolution of this research project is to look across larger sample sizes for variances or validation in the collective activities to theorize robustly on the subfield of criticism within the podcast space. The critics contributed niches of discourse to the media ecosystem while providing a frame of reference in the debates of what is criticism today. The ethnographic research process of this project provided foundations to explore the practices of podcasts in critical realms with structure, opening the door for methods that require structured approaches to coding analysis such a content analysis. The research umbrella related to this work covers podcast economies, film discourse, participatory culture, computer-mediated interaction, micro-celebrity and persona formations, and fields of practice within the entertainment media ecosystem.

5.5 Future Projects to Situate the Critical Field

The research project maintained a narrow scope within the boundaries of an ethnography, which provided insights on a largely unexplored collective of actors but included limitations in the

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generalizability. At this point in podcast culture research, the field continues to need foundation-building work, such as this project contributed, to establish theory and expectations. The foundation provided by this case study of five audio critics and their communities can directly support two areas of research: audience reception by niche and subfield routines in artistic criticism. This study also presents questions for several other areas of research from podcast economics and economic factors, participatory cultures, persona, and other mediums. I offer six entry points for research to consider in a future project (and have been living rent-free in my head throughout the study).

- Audience Reception by Niche and Taste Public: a future project may ask how audiences select audio critics and what values are important to their experience. That project would use the four niches presented in this study to organize the audience groups and further understand the purpose of niches and interest areas. That project would be qualitative and use interviews or open-ended survey methods to understand the qualities of the audience for the critics.

- Subfields of Artistic Criticism: a future project could ask questions of how strong the routines presented in this study appear across a larger sample and across artistic industries. The first study could follow a qualitative content analysis approach to measure the extent that audio critics provide first impressions and synopsis that orient and align the audience to the niche of discourse. A different analysis can look across music, art, fashion, literature, and television audio critics to measure the effectiveness of the canonical, technical, interpretive, and affective niches in categorizing critics at large in podcast culture. And an extension of that would jump to visual spaces like YouTube to measure the prevalence of the niches and genres presented in this study. With contributing studies, a framework for audio/visual criticism could be formed.

- Persona Studies for the hosts of various audio critics and the niches they exist within. Future ethnographies could focus on a single niche to better understand the qualities of the individuals who create those forms of discourse. Constructions of performed

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identities, conceptualized as personae, form at the intersection of self and social structures (Marshall & Barbour, 2015). The individual must distill the purpose of the performance through a filter of lived experiences, social norms, platform infrastructure of production and distribution for the performance, and audience expectations to craft the personality on display. The distillation process of the social, cultural, political, intrinsic, and generalized others aids in selecting the personality traits for projection (Sadoski, 1992). The persona is ultimately the presentation of the self for public expression to be understood or recognized in the social environment (Marshall & Barbour, 2015). Future projects and interrogate and explore the performed identities of audio critics across their channels and mediums to better explicate the concept in podcast and YouTube performances.

- Our understanding of spoiler culture has changed with new research. Some theories on spoilers point to the practice as ruining the narrative for audiences (Johnson & Rosenbaum, 2015), and while audio critic listeners can leave and return to the episodes to avoid spoiling the narrative, that hypothetical behavior doesn't fully explain the situation. Rosenbaum and Johnson (2016) found that individual needs for cognition and affect moderated the influence of spoilers: "those low on the need for cognition preferred spoiled stories whereas those high on the need for affect enjoyed unspoiled stories more" (p. 284). Ellithorpe and Brooke (2018) found that uncertainty from unspoiled stories can lead to increased parasocial breakup distress, thus spoilers increased enjoyment since we know what is coming. Future research on spoiler culture in relationship to audio and visual critics might ask the order of consumption for audiences (do they tend to watch the movie first, listen to the review first, etc.) and how storytellers interact with spoiler culture. I always knew exactly what happened in the plot and narrative after listening to the storytellers.

- A cycle refers to a series of genre films produced in a short period (Grindon, 2012). The cycle clusters function as helpful barometers on periods of tensions because the similar themes and narrative structures within the genre cluster relate to the themes and structures of ideology in the social situation. Future work could use audio critics, and the films they select, to identify genre cycles and unpack the discourse presented. The niches of discourse could be used to evaluate how different communities interpreted a genre to have a broader snapshot of the cultural moment. The cycle and genre study can also ask questions about which films are selected and the demographics of the directors, writers, creators, and actors. In this sample, the film selection was dominated by men in the directing role, for example. I would be interested in a quantitative content analysis on the film staffs, years, and producers that are discussed and if differences exist with significance between niches.

- Collective memory refers to the preferred readings of a text that persists among groups and within cultures (Owen & Ehrenhous, 2010). The collective memory is then the agreed upon remembrance of an event (Robinson, 2009). The formation of collective memory, and the extent that individuals accept or reject that memory, can be influenced by discourse, which provides the utility for film criticism. Future work should explore how films are remembered through audio critics or how audio critics revisit films and potentially change the collective interpretations. The genre of Rank and Review can be used to identify sites of collective memory work because the audio critics would discuss multiple films grouped by director, actor, genre, or year.

In the very, very end—this research contributed to the knowledge about podcasts, about film criticism, and about participatory culture in the media ecosystem. A lot of projects—a career of projects—stem from the findings and observations I encountered in the limited scope of this audio critic ethnography. *Yay for those recorded popcorn thoughts.*

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APPENDICES

I. Codebook for Analysis

The sensitizing concepts aid qualitative researchers in building analytical frameworks and seeking initial patterns to build emerging themes from. Attached are the concepts within the analytical framework that guided the categorization of the data. Additional visualizations of the discourse maps are provided.

High-level Structure		the over-arching qualities of the text and interaction	
Genre		grouping of discoursive interactions within social event	
	Screening Report	descriptions of shots and scenes to drive the primary discussions	The study seeks understanding of the genre(s) of audio critic engagment with film. The cases may follow, blend, expand, or create emerging generic forms to interact with the cinema landscape.
	Movie Review	summaries of plot and context with recommendations for audience	
	Theoretical Review	arguments about cinematic representation to explain complex socio-politcal structures	
	Critical Review	deconstruction of narrative and production choices to reveal nuance in artistic storytelling	
	Logic Interrogation	interrogation of the internal logic structures and continuity in artistic storytelling	
	News and Culture Review	providing updates and context on current events related to art and industry	
	Podcast Production Review	reflecting on the content and state of the podcast	
	Content Rank and Review	ranking sets of similar content or texts	
Niche		primary objectives of the interaction and text	
	Canonical	discuss the artistic qualities within the framework of canonical criticism	This study expands on the understood Schools of Criticism by incorporating audio critics into the space. The primary objectives of the audio critics differ, due to technoinfrastructures of their medium, from written criticism; therefore differing--though parallel--purposes are defined and considered. The Purpose is the overarching objective the audience receives from the critics.
	Technical	elevate the practitioners and practices of cultural production	
	Interpretive	ground interpretations of text in common language	
	Affective	express an experience with the text	
	N/A		
Aspect of Activity		discourse Actions that create the text event	
Preface		marker of conversation progression and shift in topic	
Evaluations		uses of conversations for the primary interactants	
	Aesthetic	focus on the look, quality, and artisitic merits	Every preface (conversation) has a use for those involved (the point of the conversation). The prefaces will be catagorized by evaluation to visualize how audio critics engage with films through their conversation topics and evaluations. The evaluation is the focus of the conversation for the podcasters.
	Socio-Political	focus on the cultural impacts and social connections	
	Entertainment	focus on the viewing experience and affect	
	Industry	focus on the system of production culture	
	Contextual	focus on sharing general information and context	
	Roast	focus on the inconsistencies and logic gaps	
	N/A		
Aspect of Social Relations		forms of interaction between agents	
Audience Interaction		how actors bring the audience into discourse	
	Direct Submission	engagement through email, phone, other private channel between critic and audience	This study asks how audio critics relate to each other and the audience. The interactions among agents is understood through the wholestic experience of their conversations, show notes, and long-term engagement. The aspects of social relations will be observed and analyzed throughout the ethnographic process to uncover how critics legitimize and position themselves to the imagined audience.
	Public Forum	engagement through social media, Discord, other semi-public forums for critic and audience	
	Invitation	call for engagement from critic to audience	
	Acknowledgement	break or nod from the critic to the real existance of the imagined audience	
	N/A		
Style		the markers of [brand] identity and way of reviewing	
	Story Teller	providing plot details in sequential order with added commentary of the experience	
	Traditional	follows legacy expectations for review structure	
Aspects of Communication Technology		the pathways for inter-activity for the community	
Use of Twitter		how audio critics engender support and communicate with audience	
	Publicity	marketing for new episodes	The technoinfrastructure and culture of audio criticism invites two-way communication between critic and audience. This study categorizes the use of Twitter and forms of inter-activity within the interpretive networks of the audio critic brand.
	Merchandising	marketing of events or items to buy	
	Show Topics	reference to elements of the show/episodes	
	Engagement	call or response for audience participation	
	Audience Interaction	response to audience content	
	Customer Service	answering technical issues related to podcast	
	Recommendation	steering audience towards content	
	General	functions not related to audio criticism	

Show Me the Meaning's patterns of discourse and production are displayed in the codebook with color-coordinated meaning to help us visualize their routines. The image is available in the Codebook Appendix I for visual reference. The codebook colors signify new episodes (red), patterns of conversation topics (blues), patterns of audience interactions (greens), and patterns of advertising (yellows). A dark blue line, representing the hosts giving their initial impressions, often appears close to the red lines (episode starts). A light blue line for the film synopsis or recap also appears near the red lines, indicating they provide details about the film to set up later discussions and ensure everyone remembers what happened in the movie. *Show Me the Meaning* ends most episodes with light green lines, which indicate voicemails. Those green lines are the direct submissions that regularly occur in the final 10 minutes of the episode. All the non-colored lines indicate general conversation.

CaseID	Text ID	Time Stamps	Style	Backing	Preface	Topic Description	Evaluation	Audience Interaction	Market Integration
wisecrack	SMTM01	0.00	Traditional	Crowd-Backed	3	Add for TIAA Retirement	N/A	N/A	Product/Brand-Based
wisecrack	SMTM01	1.00	Traditional	Crowd-Backed	1	Provide overview of episode and introductions for the panel	Contextual	N/A	N/A
		2.00	Traditional		2	Explain why the film was chosen above other options (Patreon voted)	Contextual	Acknowledgement	N/A
wisecrack	SMTM01	4.00	Traditional	Crowd-Backed	1	Roundtable to share impressions and opening thoughts	Entertainment	N/A	N/A
wisecrack	SMTM01	10.00	Traditional	Crowd-Backed	1	Provide the thorough retelling of the narrative	Contextual	N/A	N/A
wisecrack	SMTM01	15.00	Traditional	Crowd-Backed	3	SponCon for StoryBlocks	N/A	N/A	Product/Brand-Based
wisecrack	SMTM01	16.00	Traditional	Crowd-Backed	1	Discuss the Director's filmography and cultural values	Industry	N/A	N/A
wisecrack	SMTM01	20.00	Traditional	Crowd-Backed	2	Reference the Live Chat with a viewer comment	Industry	Public Forum	N/A
wisecrack	SMTM01	21	Traditional	Crowd-Backed	1	Unpacking the time period of the film and what the genre rep	Socio-Political	N/A	N/A
wisecrack	SMTM01	29.00	Traditional	Crowd-Backed	2	Notified the community that they tweeted out about the theme and commentary	Socio-Political	Acknowledgement	N/A
wisecrack	SMTM01	30.00	Traditional	Crowd-Backed	1	Unpack the central theme of Freedom and Anti-Capitalism	Socio-Political	N/A	N/A
wisecrack	SMTM01	36.00	Traditional	Crowd-Backed	3	SponCon for Skill Share	N/A	N/A	Product/Brand-Based
wisecrack	SMTM01	38.00	Traditional	Crowd-Backed	1	Discuss the Character ARCS	Aesthetic	N/A	N/A
wisecrack	SMTM01	47.00	Traditional	Crowd-Backed	1	Discuss the impact of wardrobe design	Aesthetic	N/A	N/A
wisecrack	SMTM01	49.00	Traditional	Crowd-Backed	3	External Ad that changes	N/A	N/A	Product/Brand-Based
wisecrack	SMTM01	50.00	Traditional	Crowd-Backed	1	Moving into the MailBag with comments from previous episodes	Socio-Political	N/A	N/A
wisecrack	SMTM01	51.00	Traditional	Crowd-Backed	2	Play Voicemail regarding a central theme (Western Cultural Preservation) from Bond Epidose	Socio-Political	Direct Submission	N/A
wisecrack	SMTM01	54.00	Traditional	Crowd-Backed	2	Play Voicemail regarding the updates and tensions with Gendered Representations	Socio-Political	Direct Submission	N/A
wisecrack	SMTM01	57.00	Traditional	Crowd-Backed	2	Play Voicemail regarding genre forms for Bond and other films	Aesthetic	Direct Submission	N/A
wisecrack	SMTM02	0.00	Traditional	Crowd-Backed	3	Ad for McDonalds	N/A	N/A	Product/Brand-Based
wisecrack	SMTM02	1.00	Traditional	Crowd-Backed	1	Team introduction and overview of episode	Contextual	N/A	N/A
wisecrack	SMTM02	1.00	Traditional	Crowd-Backed	2	Call for participation on Instagram and Twitter about reception to the film	Entertainment	Invitation	N/A
wisecrack	SMTM02	2.00	Traditional	Crowd-Backed	1	First Impressions of the film with first-watch comparisons	Entertainment	N/A	N/A
wisecrack	SMTM02	8.00	Traditional	Crowd-Backed	2	Acknowledged that they tweeted about their experience and film recommendation	Entertainment	Acknowledgement	N/A
wisecrack	SMTM02	9.00	Traditional	Crowd-Backed	1	Deeper analysis on the Director's career and relationship to the industry	Industry	N/A	N/A
wisecrack	SMTM02	11.00	Traditional	Crowd-Backed	1	Provide a retelling of the plot with light context/added explanation	Contextual	N/A	N/A
wisecrack	SMTM02	14.00	Traditional	Crowd-Backed	3	SponCon for Nord VPN	N/A	N/A	Product/Brand-Based
wisecrack	SMTM02	17.00	Traditional	Crowd-Backed	1	Upacking the theme of nostalgia in the film and the cultural black-hole in society	Socio-Political	N/A	N/A
wisecrack	SMTM02	34.00	Traditional	Crowd-Backed	2	Bring in content from the Chat about derivative vs creative works	Aesthetic	Public Forum	N/A
wisecrack	SMTM02	40.00	Traditional	Crowd-Backed	1	Categorize the film genre and social functions for interpretation of a film like this	Socio-Political	N/A	N/A
wisecrack	SMTM02	43.00	Traditional	Crowd-Backed	3	Ad for Sales Force	N/A	N/A	Product/Brand-Based
wisecrack	SMTM02	44.00	Traditional	Crowd-Backed	1	death of cinema art in favor of big IP and respond	Industry	N/A	N/A
wisecrack	SMTM02	48.00	Traditional	Crowd-Backed	2	Brought in listener comment (same as before but different comment) on cultural capital	Socio-Political	Public Forum	N/A
wisecrack	SMTM02	53.00	Traditional	Crowd-Backed	1	Opening the mailbag	Contextual	N/A	N/A
wisecrack	SMTM02	53.00	Traditional	Crowd-Backed	2	Voicemail about Ferris Bueller with character analysis	Aesthetic	Direct Submission	N/A
wisecrack	SMTM02	57.00	Traditional	Crowd-Backed	2	Voicemail about Gold Finger with british cultural point of view (privildge embedded within)	Socio-Political	Direct Submission	N/A
wisecrack	SMTM02	61.00	Traditional	Crowd-Backed	2	Called out another comment in the chat about the king arthur references in the film (theme of nostalgia)	Socio-Political	Public Forum	N/A
wisecrack	SMTM03	0.00	Traditional	Crowd-Backed	1	Introduce the episode with intros & holiday greeting	Contextual	N/A	N/A
wisecrack	SMTM03	0.00	Traditional	Crowd-Backed	2	Asked the audience to email in with any holidays that they missed	Socio-Political	Invitation	N/A
wisecrack	SMTM03	2.00	Traditional	Crowd-Backed	1	Provide the production overview of the cast and director	Industry	N/A	N/A
wisecrack	SMTM03	3.00	Traditional	Crowd-Backed	1	The panel provides the first impressions of the film focused on their experiences	Entertainment	N/A	N/A
wisecrack	SMTM03	7.00	Traditional	Crowd-Backed	1	Provide the synopsis of the narrative	Contextual	N/A	N/A
wisecrack	SMTM03	11.30	Traditional	Crowd-Backed	3	SponCon for StoryBlocks	N/A	N/A	Product/Brand-Based
wisecrack	SMTM03	12.00	Traditional	Crowd-Backed	3	SponCon for Nord VPN	N/A	N/A	Product/Brand-Based
wisecrack	SMTM03	14.00	Traditional	Crowd-Backed	1	Enter the deeper discussion of the tone and tensions between cuts of the film	Aesthetic	N/A	N/A
wisecrack	SMTM03	22.00	Traditional	Crowd-Backed	1	Unpack the theme of humor and social reception to what is funny	Socio-Political	N/A	N/A
wisecrack	SMTM03	28.00	Traditional	Crowd-Backed	3	SponCon for Shutter streaming service	N/A	N/A	Product/Brand-Based
wisecrack	SMTM03	31.00	Traditional	Crowd-Backed	1	Unpack what themes and qualities designate the Holiday film genre	Aesthetic	N/A	N/A
wisecrack	SMTM03	33.00	Traditional	Crowd-Backed	2	Acknowledge the chat exists but imagine their reactions to the analysis of the sandwich	Socio-Political	Acknowledgement	N/A
wisecrack	SMTM03	35.00	Traditional	Crowd-Backed	1	Conduct a character analysis with feminist and erotic critiques on the arc	Socio-Political	N/A	N/A
wisecrack	SMTM03	46.00	Traditional	Crowd-Backed	1	Provide final thoughts and conclusions of the themes in the film	Socio-Political	N/A	N/A
wisecrack	SMTM03	49.00	Traditional	Crowd-Backed	3	SponCon for Magic Spoon Cereal	N/A	N/A	Product/Brand-Based
wisecrack	SMTM03	51.00	Traditional	Crowd-Backed	1	Go into the mailbag with voicemails	Contextual	N/A	N/A
wisecrack	SMTM03	52.00	Traditional	Crowd-Backed	2	Played voicemail from Lucy about Goldfinger with the theme of masculinity	Socio-Political	Direct Submission	N/A
wisecrack	SMTM03	59.00	Traditional	Crowd-Backed	1	Outro with how to connect and they provide an episode recap	Contextual	Invitation	N/A
wisecrack	SMTM03	60.00	Traditional	Crowd-Backed	1	Wrap up with a call to participate for takes on the back catalog	Contextual	Invitation	N/A
wisecrack	SMTM03	61.00	Traditional	Crowd-Backed	1	Outro with how to connect and they provide an episode recap	Contextual	Invitation	N/A
wisecrack	SMTM04	0.00	Traditional	Crowd-Backed	1	Introduction to the panel	Contextual	N/A	N/A
wisecrack	SMTM04	2.00	Traditional	Crowd-Backed	1	Share first impressions from the group focused on writing and pacing	Aesthetic	N/A	N/A
wisecrack	SMTM04	9.00	Traditional	Crowd-Backed	1	Provide the detailed recap	Contextual	N/A	N/A
wisecrack	SMTM04	13.00	Traditional	Crowd-Backed	3	SponCon for Skill Share	N/A	N/A	Product/Brand-Based
wisecrack	SMTM04	15.00	Traditional	Crowd-Backed	1	Opened the "flood gates" to questions they had while watching; the theme of capitalist ethos, romantic scripts, and monkey paw came up	Socio-Political	N/A	N/A
wisecrack	SMTM04	27.00	Traditional	Crowd-Backed	2	Referenced the Chat with a roast of the wish logic	N/A	Public Forum	N/A
wisecrack	SMTM04	29.00	Traditional	Crowd-Backed	1	Unpack a how the social themes of desire, temptation, and morality of the film don't hold up under analysis and are not fully realized	Socio-Political	N/A	N/A
wisecrack	SMTM04	35.00	Traditional	Crowd-Backed	3	SponCon for Magic Spoon Cereal	N/A	N/A	Product/Brand-Based
wisecrack	SMTM04	37.00	Traditional	Crowd-Backed	1	Interrogated the logic and how the principles of screenwriting can be analyzed	Roast	N/A	N/A
wisecrack	SMTM04	50.00	Traditional	Crowd-Backed	3	Ad for McDonalds	N/A	N/A	Product/Brand-Based
wisecrack	SMTM04	50.00	Traditional	Crowd-Backed	2	Acknowledge the audience who might want more on the philosophy	N/A	Acknowledgement	N/A
wisecrack	SMTM04	51.00	Traditional	Crowd-Backed	2	Hans voicemail on Ready Player One themes	N/A	direct submission	N/A
wisecrack	SMTM04	51.00	Traditional	Crowd-Backed	1	Turns to the mailbag	Contextual	N/A	N/A
wisecrack	SMTM04	55.00	Traditional	Crowd-Backed	2	Juan Pablo email message asking about a video on Tenet	N/A	direct submission	N/A
wisecrack	SMTM04	58.00	Traditional	Crowd-Backed	2	Wrap Up with social handles and tell us to watch Soul for the next episode	Contextual	Invitation	N/A
wisecrack	SMTM05	0.00	Traditional	Crowd-Backed	1	Introduce the Panel and the film	Contextual	N/A	N/A
wisecrack	SMTM05	2.00	Traditional	Crowd-Backed	1	Go around and share reactions and impressions focused on experience with Pixar films	Entertainment	N/A	N/A
wisecrack	SMTM05	6.00	Traditional	Crowd-Backed	2	Pay attention to the chat and how Coco was showing up a lot	N/A	Public Forum	N/A
wisecrack	SMTM05	8.00	Traditional	Crowd-Backed	1	Provide a detailed recap	Contextual	N/A	N/A
wisecrack	SMTM05	12.00	Traditional	Crowd-Backed	3	SponCon for Skill Share	N/A	N/A	Product/Brand-Based
wisecrack	SMTM05	14.00	Traditional	Crowd-Backed	1	Unpack the coolness and impact of Black music on culture and art	Socio-Political	N/A	N/A
wisecrack	SMTM05	16.00	Traditional	Crowd-Backed	2	alphaomega in the chat worked in the art department and they invite them to call in	N/A	Invitation	N/A
wisecrack	SMTM05	25.00	Traditional	Crowd-Backed	2	They said they received many twitter and instagram messages	N/A	Acknowledgement	N/A
wisecrack	SMTM05	25.00	Traditional	Crowd-Backed	1	Unpack the theme of affirmation and gratitude in life	Socio-Political	N/A	N/A
wisecrack	SMTM05	33.00	Traditional	Crowd-Backed	1	Share how the theme plays out in their personal lives and how they experienced the film	Entertainment	N/A	N/A
wisecrack	SMTM05	40.00	Traditional	Crowd-Backed	1	Unpack the subtheme of security vs. passion	Socio-Political	N/A	N/A
wisecrack	SMTM05	44.00	Traditional	Crowd-Backed	1	Philosophize on childbirth and the Truth in Reality	Socio-Political	N/A	N/A
wisecrack	SMTM05	46.00	Traditional	Crowd-Backed	2	Play voicemail from Emily on WW production and style	Industry	Direct Submission	N/A
wisecrack	SMTM05	46.00	Traditional	Crowd-Backed	2	Invitation for comments on philosophy in the chat	N/A	Invitation	N/A
wisecrack	SMTM05	51.00	Traditional	Crowd-Backed	2	Read email from Sonny on Bad Santa with experience of the narrative	Entertainment	Direct Submission	N/A
wisecrack	SMTM05	55.00	Traditional	Crowd-Backed	1	Wrapping up the show with some recommendations	Entertainment	N/A	N/A

The discourse map for *Pop Culture Happy Hour* visualized a pattern of structure and predictable activity, indicative of a broadcast network organizational influence. The discourse map color-codes the Aspects of Activity, Aspects of Social Relations, and Aspects of Technology across the episodes. A red line indicates a new episode has started with blue lines showing activities, green lines for audience engagement, and yellow lines for market integration using the technologies: the map is provided in the Codebook Appendix I for visual reference.

CaseID	Text ID	Time Stamps	Style	Backing	Preface	Topic Description	Evaluation	Audience Interaction	Market Integration
pchh	PCHH01	0.00	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	1	Introduction to the panel and episode topics	Contextual	N/A	N/A
pchh	PCHH01	1.00	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	1	Provide the synopsis of the content with all the stars (Happiest Season)	Contextual	N/A	N/A
pchh	PCHH01	2.00	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	1	Go around the panel sharing the reactions to performance and characters dynamics with social themes	Socio-Political	N/A	N/A
pchh	PCHH01	7.00	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	1	Highlight Glenn (Queer) host's perspective on queer holiday movies	Socio-Political	N/A	N/A
pchh	PCHH01	9.00	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	1	Discuss the impacts of the Hallmark channel producing queer stories	Industry	N/A	N/A
pchh	PCHH01	11.00	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	2	Provide the audience with a sign post that rest of episode is about tv	Industry	Acknowledgement	N/A
pchh	PCHH01	12.00	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	3	Ad for Spotify podcast	N/A	N/A	Media-based
pchh	PCHH02	0.00	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	3	Ad for First National Bank	N/A	N/A	Product/Brand-Based
pchh	PCHH02	1.00	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	3	Request for Donations to NPR	N/A	N/A	Crowd-Based
pchh	PCHH02	2.00	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	1	Provide high-level overview of the film and themes to look for in context with the Academy	Aesthetic	N/A	N/A
pchh	PCHH02	3.00	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	1	Share initial impressions and thoughts on performance, cinematic style	Aesthetic	N/A	N/A
pchh	PCHH02	11.00	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	1	Deeper discussion of the Characters and Actors through dialogue and delivery notes	Aesthetic	N/A	N/A
pchh	PCHH02	15.00	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	2	Invite audience to share thoughts on social media channels	Entertainment	Invitation	N/A
pchh	PCHH02	16.00	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	3	Ad for a new show that requires a Showtime subscription	N/A	N/A	Media-Based
pchh	PCHH02	16.30	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	3	Ad for Teledoc service for work	N/A	N/A	Product/Brand-Based
pchh	PCHH02	17.00	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	1	Share media recommendations for the audience	Entertainment	Invitation	N/A
pchh	PCHH03	0.00	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	3	Ad for Olive Health Care	N/A	N/A	Product/Brand-Based
pchh	PCHH03	1.00	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	1	Glen provides the contextual synopsis	Contextual	N/A	N/A
pchh	PCHH03	2.00	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	1	Panel provides initial/general impressions with personal meaning when viewing	Entertainment	N/A	N/A
pchh	PCHH03	5.00	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	2	Pointed towards a Twitter thread about the character arc and reception within cultural implications	Socio-Political	Acknowledgement	N/A
pchh	PCHH03	7.00	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	1	Provide a character analysis	Aesthetic	N/A	N/A
pchh	PCHH03	9.00	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	3	Ad for Microsoft Teams	N/A	N/A	Product/Brand-Based
pchh	PCHH03	10.00	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	1	Considering the music and scoring of the film with audio snippets	Aesthetic	N/A	N/A
pchh	PCHH03	13.00	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	1	Considering what the performances bring to the film and the dynamic within	Aesthetic	N/A	N/A
pchh	PCHH03	18.00	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	1	Where the film exists within Nerd Culture	Socio-Political	N/A	N/A
pchh	PCHH03	21.00	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	1	Sign off and final thoughts	Entertainment	N/A	N/A
pchh	PCHH03	21.00	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	2	Call to share thoughts and subscribe to newsletter	Entertainment	Invitation	N/A
pchh	PCHH03	22.00	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	3	Ad for It's Been a Minute podcast	N/A	N/A	Media-Based
pchh	PCHH03	22.00	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	3	Ad from Olive Health Systems	N/A	N/A	Product/Brand-Based
pchh	PCHH04	0.00	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	3	Asking for donations to improve equipment and fund NPR	N/A	N/A	Crowd-based
pchh	PCHH04	2.00	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	1	Provide the synopsis of the movie	Contextual	N/A	N/A
pchh	PCHH04	3.00	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	1	Provide a context around the actors	Industry	N/A	N/A
pchh	PCHH04	4.00	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	1	Share the general impressions with focus on characters, writing, and performances	Aesthetic	N/A	N/A
pchh	PCHH04	6.00	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	1	Unpack the queer aspects of the show and the tone	Socio-Political	N/A	N/A
pchh	PCHH04	13.00	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	1	Deeper analysis of the casting, performances, and souce materials	Aesthetic	N/A	N/A
pchh	PCHH04	19.00	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	1	Describing the visuals and set design	Aesthetic	N/A	N/A
pchh	PCHH04	20.00	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	3	Ad for Microsoft Teams	N/A	N/A	Product/Brand-Based
pchh	PCHH04	20.00	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	2	Asking the audience to share their thoughts	Entertainment	Invitation	N/A
pchh	PCHH04	21.00	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	3	Ad for Split It	Entertainment	N/A	Product/Brand-Based
pchh	PCHH04	22.00	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	1	Recommendations for other media content	Entertainment	N/A	N/A
pchh	PCHH04	29.00	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	3	Ad/Trailer for additional NPR content and podcasts	N/A	N/A	Media-based
pchh	PCHH05	0.00	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	3	Ad for Peacock Streaming Service	N/A	N/A	Media-based
pchh	PCHH05	1.00	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	1	Provide overview of episode and introductions for the panel	Contextual	N/A	N/A
pchh	PCHH05	1.00	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	1	Introduce the context of the Director within Film History	Industry	N/A	N/A
pchh	PCHH05	2.00	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	1	Share initial impressions and thoughts on the work within the context of the director	Industry	N/A	N/A
pchh	PCHH05	4.00	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	1	Guest provides historical and political context for Black British history	Socio-Political	N/A	N/A
pchh	PCHH05	7.00	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	1	Unpack how the film fits into the social learning and meaning making for society	Socio-Political	N/A	N/A
pchh	PCHH05	12.00	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	3	Ad for a ShowTime limited Series	N/A	N/A	Media-based
pchh	PCHH05	12.00	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	3	Ad for Bank of America	N/A	N/A	Product/Brand-Based
pchh	PCHH05	13.00	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	1	Discuss the specific films within the anthology focused on the cinematography, sounds, character analysis	Aesthetic	N/A	N/A
pchh	PCHH05	22.00	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	1	Wrap up thoughts	Entertainment	N/a	N/A
pchh	PCHH05	23.00	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	2	Ask the audience to engage and share thoughts online	N/A	Invitation	N/A
pchh	PCHH05	24.00	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	3	Ad for NPR podcast	N/A	N/A	Media-based
pchh	PCHH06	0.00	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	3	Request for Donations to NPR	N/A	N/A	Crowd-based
pchh	PCHH06	1.00	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	1	Provide the overview of the film and panel introductions	Contextual	N/A	N/A
pchh	PCHH06	2.00	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	1	Provide the film synopsis with some extra context	Contextual	N/A	N/A
pchh	PCHH06	3.00	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	1	Share impressions from the panel with emphasis on actor performances	Aesthetic	N/A	N/A
pchh	PCHH06	13.00	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	1	Discussion of the theme of respect and art intersecting with culture	Socio-Political	N/A	N/A
pchh	PCHH06	15.00	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	1	Deeper Dive into the source material and how it translates across mediums	Aesthetic	N/A	N/A
pchh	PCHH06	17.00	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	2	Invite audience to share thoughts on social media channels	N/A	Invitation	N/A
pchh	PCHH06	17.00	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	1	Provide final recommendations on seeing it	Entertainment	N/A	N/A
pchh	PCHH06	18.00	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	3	Ad for ShowTime	N/A	N/A	Media-based
pchh	PCHH06	18.00	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	3	Ad for Teledoc service for work	N/A	N/A	Product/Brand-Based
pchh	PCHH06	20.00	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	1	Provide the other pop culture recommendations (What's Making Us Happy)	Entertainment	N/A	N/A
pchh	PCHH06	26.00	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	3	Ad for NPR podcast	N/A	N/A	Media-based
pchh	PCHH06	26.00	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	3	Ad for FNBO Bank	N/A	N/A	Product/Brand-Based
pchh	PCHH07	0.00	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	3	Ad for Peacock Streaming Service with Saved by the Bell Reboot	N/A	N/A	Media-Based
pchh	PCHH07	1.00	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	1	Provide the overview of the episode and content teaser	Contextual	N/A	N/A
pchh	PCHH07	1.00	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	3	Ad for Split It	N/A	N/A	Product/Brand-Based
pchh	PCHH07	2.00	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	1	Provide synopsis of the plot with critical context	Contextual	N/A	N/A
pchh	PCHH07	2.00	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	1	Share impressions and thoughts around the panel with focus on viewing experience	Entertainment	N/A	N/A
pchh	PCHH07	9.00	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	2	Provide suggestions to help the audience experience the film	Entertainment	Acknowledgement	N/A
pchh	PCHH07	10.00	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	1	Unpack the tone of the film	Aesthetic	N/A	N/A
pchh	PCHH07	11.00	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	1	Discuss reactions to the film from critics and audiences	Industry	N/A	N/A
pchh	PCHH07	13.00	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	1	Wrap Up and invite the audience to see and share on social media	Contextual	N/A	N/A
pchh	PCHH07	13.00	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	2	Invite audience to share thoughts on social media channels	N/A	Invitation	N/A
pchh	PCHH07	13.00	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	3	Ad for NPR podcast	N/A	N/A	Media-Based
pchh	PCHH07	14.00	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	3	Ad for Merrill Investing	N/A	N/A	Product/Brand-Based
pchh	PCHH08	0.00	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	3	Ad for Peacock	N/A	N/A	Media-Based
pchh	PCHH08	0.00	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	3	SponCon for donations for NPR podcast	N/A	N/A	Crowd-Based
pchh	PCHH08	1.00	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	1	Provide the episode intro and overview	Contextual	N/A	N/A
pchh	PCHH08	2.00	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	3	Ad for Bank of America	N/A	N/A	Product/Brand-Based
pchh	PCHH08	3.00	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	3	Ad for How I Built This	N/A	N/A	Media-based
pchh	PCHH08	3.00	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	1	Provide the film synopsis with some extra context	Contextual	N/A	N/A
pchh	PCHH08	5.00	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	1	Share the panel first impressions with notes on the set design, screenplay, cinematraphy	Aesthetic	N/A	N/A
pchh	PCHH08	9.00	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	1	Share frustrations and gaps in the film focused on character writing and production notes	Aesthetic	N/A	N/A
pchh	PCHH08	12.00	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	1	Share final thoughts and wrap up with the call to share online	Contextual	N/A	N/A
pchh	PCHH08	12.00	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	2	Ask audience to share their experience and thoughts online	N/A	Invitation	N/A
pchh	PCHH08	13.00	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	3	Asking for donations to improve equipment and fund NPR	N/A	N/A	Crowd-Based
pchh	PCHH09	0.00	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	3	Ad for Peacock	N/A	N/A	Media-Based
pchh	PCHH09	0.00	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	3	Asking for donations to improve equipment and fund NPR	N/A	N/A	crowd-based
pchh	PCHH09	1.00	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	1	Provide the synopsis with the set up	Contextual	N/A	N/A
pchh	PCHH09	3.00	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	1	Share impressions focused on tone, CGI, plotting, characters, and stunt choreography	Aesthetic	N/A	N/A
pchh	PCHH09	12.00	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	1	Provide a character analysis with theming and motivations	Aesthetic	N/A	N/A
pchh	PCHH09	15.00	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	1	Interrogate the internal logic of the plot	Roast	N/A	N/A
pchh	PCHH09	17.00	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	2	Ask the audience to engage and share thoughts online	N/A	Invitation	N/A
pchh	PCHH09	17.00	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	3	Ad for Diversifund Investing	N/A	N/A	Product/Brand-Based
pchh	PCHH09	17.00	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	3	Ad for Powers Gold Label Whiskey	N/A	N/A	Product/Brand-Based
pchh	PCHH09	18.00	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	3	Ad for How I Built This	N/A	N/A	Media-based
pchh	PCHH09	18.00	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	1	Roundtable of recommendations based on What is Making Us Happy	Entertainment	N/A	N/A
pchh	PCHH10	0.00	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	3	Ad for Hillbilly Elegy movie	N/A	N/A	media-based
pchh	PCHH10	0.00	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	1	Preview of the episode	Contextual	N/A	N/A
pchh	PCHH10	1.00	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	3	Ad for a Business and Leadership Book	N/A	N/A	Media-based
pchh	PCHH10	2.00	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	1	Provide film synopsis	Contextual	N/A	N/A
pchh	PCHH10	3.00	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	1	Share the first impressions and thoughts on performance, animation design, genre	Aesthetic	N/A	N/A
pchh	PCHH10	12.00	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	1	Expanded on a central musical theme and the score	Aesthetic	N/A	N/A
pchh	PCHH10	13.00	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	1	Discuss the cultural context around death and discovery	Socio-Political	N/A	N/A
pchh	PCHH10	15.00	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	1	Wrap up with final thoughts and ask for listener opinions	Contextual	Invitation	N/A
pchh	PCHH10	16.00	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	3	Ad for Planet Money	N/A	N/A	Media-based
pchh	PCHH10	16.00	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	3	Ad for Olive Health Care	N/A	N/A	Product/Brand-Based
pchh	PCHH11	0.00	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	3	Ad for Olive Health Care	N/A	N/A	Product/Brand-Based
pchh	PCHH11	1.00	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	1	Provide the film synopsis with some extra context	Contextual	N/A	N/A
pchh	PCHH11	1.00	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	3	Ad for Business Book	N/A	N/A	Media-based
pchh	PCHH11	2.00	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	1	Sharing impressions of the film on the pacing, set design, and emotional arc	Aesthetic	N/A	N/A
pchh	PCHH11	5.00	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	1	Expanded on the cultural influences	Socio-Political	N/A	N/A
pchh	PCHH11	8.00	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	1	Expanded on the pacing and the story plotting	Aesthetic	N/A	N/A
pchh	PCHH11	10.00	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	1	Discussed the humor and tone within the cultural context for jokes	Socio-Political	N/A	N/A
pchh	PCHH11	13.00	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	1	Unpacked the moral themes and connection to immigration policy	Socio-Political	N/A	N/A
pchh	PCHH11	16.00	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	1	Wrap up with final thoughts	Contextual	N/A	N/A
pchh	PCHH11	16.00	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	2	Invite audience to share thoughts on social media channels	N/A	Invitation	N/A
pchh	PCHH11	16.00	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	3	Ad for Planet Money	N/A	N/A	Media-Based

The conversation map for *The Big Picture's* episodes with just a film review distinctly lacks greens (audience interactions) and features many white bars, indicating general topics of conversation: a visual reference is provided in the Codebook Appendix I. One of the few recognizable patterns is the field-level routine of providing first impressions and a film synopsis early in the episode (dark and light blue lines). Only six red bars appear, which indicate new episodes, because I did not formally map the discourse for podcasts that did not explicitly review a film.

CaseID	Text ID	Time Stamps	Style	Backing	Preface	Topic Description	Evaluation	Audience Interaction	Market Integration
thebigpic	TBP01	0.00	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	1	Opening with the overview of the episode	Contextual	N/A	N/A
thebigpic	TBP01	1.00	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	3	SponCon for Duracell Battery	N/A	N/A	Product/Brand-Based
thebigpic	TBP01	1.00	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	3	Spon Con for Heineken Beer	N/A	N/A	Product/Brand-Based
thebigpic	TBP01	2.00	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	2	Thanking listeners for the Spotify Wrapped shout outs	N/A	Acknowledgement	N/A
thebigpic	TBP01	4.00	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	1	Providing some context around why this episode is exciting for hosts and what they appreciated about it	Entertainment	N/A	N/A
thebigpic	TBP01	5.00	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	1	Provide the back story and context for Mank with production and the creative process in mind	Industry	N/A	N/A
thebigpic	TBP01	9.00	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	1	Unpack the spirit of the source material and key themes from the source film	Aesthetic	N/A	N/A
thebigpic	TBP01	12.00	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	1	Setting expectations for the viewer to understand the setting, tone, and medium	Entertainment	N/A	N/A
thebigpic	TBP01	21.00	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	1	Critique the film making style and artistic design	Aesthetic	N/A	N/A
thebigpic	TBP01	27.00	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	1	Contextualize what the movie means to Hollywood system	Industry	N/A	N/A
thebigpic	TBP01	45.00	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	3	SponCon for Infinity car sales event	N/A	N/A	Product/Brand-Based
thebigpic	TBP01	45.00	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	3	SponCon for Duracell Battery	N/A	N/A	Product/Brand-Based
thebigpic	TBP01	46.00	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	1	Explore the controversy associated with biopic genre and souce material	Socio-Political	N/A	N/A
thebigpic	TBP01	50.00	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	1	Provide rich analysis of the character and actor-study	Aesthetic	N/A	N/A
thebigpic	TBP01	63.00	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	1	Connect the film as a vehicle for modern political issues	Socio-Political	N/A	N/A
thebigpic	TBP01	69.00	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	1	Consider the prospects of the film within Oscar discussions/race	Industry	N/A	N/A
thebigpic	TBP01	75.00	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	2	Describe their purpose as helping people understand the context around films	Industry	Acknowledgement	N/A
thebigpic	TBP01	87.00	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	1	Rank the film within the Director's career	Industry	N/A	N/A
thebigpic	TBP01	89.00	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	1	Final recommendations for watching the film or not	Entertainment	N/A	N/A
thebigpic	TBP02	0.00	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	1	Provides overview for the episode	Contextual	N/A	N/A
thebigpic	TBP02	0.00	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	3	Spon Con for Heineken Beer	N/A	N/A	Product/Brand-Based
thebigpic	TBP02	2.00	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	1	Reactions to the industry announcement about the Oscar Producer	Industry	N/A	N/A
thebigpic	TBP02	5.00	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	1	Provide the Synopsis for Let Them Talk movie	Contextual	N/A	N/A
thebigpic	TBP02	6.00	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	1	Provide reactions to the film focused on director, production, and place in film history	Industry	N/A	N/A
thebigpic	TBP02	11.00	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	2	Mentions that an ex listens to the podcast	N/A	Acknowledgement	N/A
thebigpic	TBP02	14.00	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	1	Explain the rest of the show and move into the Rankings portion	Contextual	N/A	N/A
thebigpic	TBP03	0.00	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	1	Intro to the show and rundown of the content	Contextual	N/A	N/A
thebigpic	TBP03	1.00	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	3	SponCon for hyundai with podcast guide integration	N/A	N/A	Product/Brand-Based
thebigpic	TBP03	1.00	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	3	SponCon for Heineken	N/A	N/A	Product/Brand-Based
thebigpic	TBP03	2.00	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	1	Introduce themselves to the audience again and the structure of the show	Contextual	N/A	N/A
thebigpic	TBP03	3.00	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	1	Described the leaked audio of Tom Cruise as a pop culture news event	Industry	N/A	N/A
thebigpic	TBP03	9.00	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	1	Share impressions on the film with new viewing experience	Entertainment	N/A	N/A
thebigpic	TBP03	10.00	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	2	Tell the audience to listen to the previous episode on Tenet	N/A	Acknowledgement	N/A
thebigpic	TBP03	18.00	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	1	Provide a character analysis though lense of Director's career	Industry	N/A	N/A
thebigpic	TBP03	22.00	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	1	Discuss their favorite moments with scene analysis	Aesthetic	N/A	N/A
thebigpic	TBP03	34.00	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	1	Discuss the Director's filmography and cultural values	Industry	N/A	N/A
thebigpic	TBP03	38.00	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	1	Talk additionally about the Director and what films he might make next through financial lens	Industry	N/A	N/A
thebigpic	TBP03	50.00	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	1	Some discussion on the final theme of film around moral	Socio-Political	N/A	N/A
thebigpic	TBP03	54.00	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	3	SponCon for hyundai with podcast guide integration	N/A	N/A	Product/Brand-Based
thebigpic	TBP03	54.00	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	3	SponCon for Heineken	N/A	N/A	Product/Brand-Based
thebigpic	TBP03	56.00	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	3	SponCon for Energizer	N/A	N/A	Product/Brand-Based
thebigpic	TBP04	0.00	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	1	Overview of the episode	Contextual	N/A	N/A
thebigpic	TBP04	1.00	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	3	SponCon for hyundai with podcast guide integration	N/A	N/A	Product/Brand-Based
thebigpic	TBP04	1.00	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	3	SponCon for Energizer	N/A	N/A	Product/Brand-Based
thebigpic	TBP04	3.00	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	1	News segment on Awards Season and Critic Choices/impacts on culture	Industry	N/A	N/A
thebigpic	TBP04	14.00	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	1	Begin review of Ma Rainey with the production synopsis and source material	Industry	N/A	N/A
thebigpic	TBP04	15.00	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	1	Sharing the initial impressions of the work with focus on performance, Oscar bids, and consumers	Industry	N/A	N/A
thebigpic	TBP04	19.00	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	1	Unpacking the Character and Performance analysis of two leads	Aesthetic	N/A	N/A
thebigpic	TBP04	25.00	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	3	SponCon for Heineken	N/A	N/A	Product/Brand-Based
thebigpic	TBP04	26.00	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	3	SponCon for Energizer	N/A	N/A	Product/Brand-Based
thebigpic	TBP05	0.00	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	1	Open with episode overview	Contextual	N/A	N/A
thebigpic	TBP05	1.00	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	3	SponCon for hyundai with podcast guide integration	N/A	N/A	Product/Brand-Based
thebigpic	TBP05	1.00	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	2	They state that it is Christmas Day (when the film is released) meaning they had a screener to record earlier	N/A	Acknowledgement	N/A
thebigpic	TBP05	3.00	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	1	Provide initial takes and focus on predicting what the critical reception will be	Industry	N/A	N/A
thebigpic	TBP05	5.00	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	1	Discuss the setting for the film and the nostalgia work in the set	Aesthetic	N/A	N/A
thebigpic	TBP05	7.00	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	1	Provide a discussion of the framing device for the plot with character and narrative notes	Aesthetic	N/A	N/A
thebigpic	TBP05	9.00	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	2	They tell the audience this will be a full-spoiler episode and encourage folks to watch	N/A	Acknowledgement	N/A
thebigpic	TBP05	9.00	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	1	Critique the motivations and interrogating the plot devices	Roast	N/A	N/A
thebigpic	TBP05	17.00	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	1	Contextualize the film within the culture of genre and source material	Industry	N/A	N/A
thebigpic	TBP05	22.00	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	1	Unpack the role and place of Diana within the narrative through interrogating scenes they didn't get	Roast	N/A	N/A
thebigpic	TBP05	29.00	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	1	Consider the cultural aspects of the time and medium of film release with political contexts	Socio-Political	N/A	N/A
thebigpic	TBP05	34.00	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	1	Discuss the Actor performances and the Director's role	Industry	N/A	N/A
thebigpic	TBP05	38.00	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	1	Discussed the action and pacing compared to similar genre films	Industry	N/A	N/A
thebigpic	TBP05	42.00	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	1	Predict the future of the franchise and would work for the character and genre within industry	Industry	N/A	N/A
thebigpic	TBP05	49.00	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	1	Unpack how the film worked as an at home experience	Entertainment	N/A	N/A
thebigpic	TBP05	61.00	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	3	Spon Con for Heineken Beer	N/A	N/A	Product/Brand-Based
thebigpic	TBP06	0.00	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	1	Episode overview and teaser	Contextual	N/A	N/A
thebigpic	TBP06	41.00	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	1	Open with impressions and reflections on Soul	Entertainment	N/A	N/A
thebigpic	TBP06	43.00	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	1	Provide the synopsis of the film	Contextual	N/A	N/A
thebigpic	TBP06	45.00	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	1	Unpack the themes and ideas focused on how we cope and become aware	Socio-Political	N/A	N/A
thebigpic	TBP06	61.00	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	1	Focus on Pixar's Leadership and production	Industry	N/A	N/A
thebigpic	TBP06	70.00	Traditional	Legacy-Backed	1	Discuss why the film should win Best Picture or Best Animated Picture	Aesthetic	N/A	N/A

The conversation visualizations for *Black Girl Film Club* show how many topics it covers in a single episode because of all the white space between the red lines (new episodes). The visual reference is provided in the Codebook Appendix I. They do follow the field routines of providing first impressions and a synopsis of the movie as represented with the dark and light blue lines.

CaseID	Text ID	Time Stamps	Style	Backing	Preface	Topic Description	Evaluation	Audience Interaction	Market Integration
blkgirlfilmclub	BGFC01	0.00	Story Teller	Crowd-Backed	2	Reference to episode library	Contextual	Acknowledgement	N/A
blkgirlfilmclub	BGFC01	2.00	Story Teller	Crowd-Backed	1	Explain why the film was chosen above other options	Entertainment	N/A	N/A
blkgirlfilmclub	BGFC01	10.00	Story Teller	Crowd-Backed	1	First Impressions of the film	Entertainment	N/A	N/A
blkgirlfilmclub	BGFC01	13.00	Story Teller	Crowd-Backed	1	Describe the tone and story telling mechanisms in specific scenes	Aesthetic	N/A	N/A
blkgirlfilmclub	BGFC01	14.30	Story Teller	Crowd-Backed	2	Acknowledge how they prep notes and thoughts when viewing	Industry	Acknowledgement	N/A
blkgirlfilmclub	BGFC01	16.30	Story Teller	Crowd-Backed	1	Consider the social and personal impact of the film in their lives	Entertainment	N/A	N/A
blkgirlfilmclub	BGFC01	19.30	Story Teller	Crowd-Backed	2	Cite themselves as "on record" providing thoughts and takes (tropic thunder takes)	Socio-Political	Acknowledgement	N/A
blkgirlfilmclub	BGFC01	20.00	Story Teller	Crowd-Backed	1	Unpacking genre and context for blackface/ black films and truecrime/violence	Socio-Political	N/A	N/A
blkgirlfilmclub	BGFC01	28.30	Story Teller	Crowd-Backed	1	Provide a high-level overview of the plot, characters, and what to expect as an audience with expanded context	Entertainment	N/A	N/A
blkgirlfilmclub	BGFC01	39.00	Story Teller	Crowd-Backed	2	Let us on a conversation "before they turned on the mics" which related to the actress	Contextual	Acknowledgement	N/A
blkgirlfilmclub	BGFC01	42.00	Story Teller	Crowd-Backed	1	Begin series of rich descriptions of the plot sequencing through major beats	Contextual	N/A	N/A
blkgirlfilmclub	BGFC01	54.00	Story Teller	Crowd-Backed	1	Contextualize director with the feeling and tone of the film including theme of hyper-violence	Industry	N/A	N/A
blkgirlfilmclub	BGFC01	62.00	Story Teller	Crowd-Backed	1	Unpacking the phenomenon of killer obsession and serial killers in the public eye	Socio-Political	N/A	N/A
blkgirlfilmclub	BGFC01	67.00	Story Teller	Crowd-Backed	1	Describing scenecs they liked/didn't like with thick descriptions-- themes of violence and stereotypes	Socio-Political	N/A	N/A
blkgirlfilmclub	BGFC01	78.00	Story Teller	Crowd-Backed	1	Back to conversation about the director and production implications	Industry	N/A	N/A
blkgirlfilmclub	BGFC01	82.00	Story Teller	Crowd-Backed	1	Return to rich scene descriptions as vehicle to explain the extended retelling of the story	Contextual	N/A	N/A
blkgirlfilmclub	BGFC01	86.00	Story Teller	Crowd-Backed	2	Relating to the audience through COVID and getting zoned out in the film	Entertainment	Acknowledgement	N/A
blkgirlfilmclub	BGFC01	96.00	Story Teller	Crowd-Backed	2	Provide context on media and cultural references they make	Contextual	Acknowledgement	N/A
blkgirlfilmclub	BGFC01	110.00	Story Teller	Crowd-Backed	1	Final recommendation of the movie and thoughts	Entertainment	N/A	N/A
blkgirlfilmclub	BGFC01	113.00	Story Teller	Crowd-Backed	1	Compare and unpack state of Black narratives and pressures on Black creatives	Industry	N/A	N/A
blkgirlfilmclub	BGFC01	124.00	Story Teller	Crowd-Backed	2	Share tips to the audience for consuming film with sensitivities and warners	Contextual	Acknowledgement	N/A
blkgirlfilmclub	BGFC01	128.00	Story Teller	Crowd-Backed	1	Wrap up with a preview for the rest of December content	Contextual	N/A	N/A
blkgirlfilmclub	BGFC01	129.00	Story Teller	Crowd-Backed	2	Call for interaction because they didn't have any emails that week	Entertainment	Invitation	N/A
blkgirlfilmclub	BGFC02	0.00	Story Teller	Crowd-Backed	1	Intro with context on why the film was selected	Contextual	N/A	N/A
blkgirlfilmclub	BGFC02	3.00	Story Teller	Crowd-Backed	1	Reflect on personal experiences with the film in place of context within culture	Socio-Political	N/A	N/A
blkgirlfilmclub	BGFC02	10.00	Story Teller	Crowd-Backed	2	Acknowledge the audience and the power of podcast editing for segments	N/A	Acknowledgement	N/A
blkgirlfilmclub	BGFC02	14.00	Story Teller	Crowd-Backed	1	Unpack the casting and industry patterns around this genre and movie star	Industry	N/A	N/A
blkgirlfilmclub	BGFC02	23.00	Story Teller	Crowd-Backed	1	Describe the genre of superheros and how they experience the genre	Entertainment	N/A	N/A
blkgirlfilmclub	BGFC02	29.00	Story Teller	Crowd-Backed	1	Provide synopsis of the film with extended context and factoids	Contextual	N/A	N/A
blkgirlfilmclub	BGFC02	40.00	Story Teller	Crowd-Backed	1	Overview and identify a social theme in the film (ableism)	Socio-Political	N/A	N/A
blkgirlfilmclub	BGFC02	41.00	Story Teller	Crowd-Backed	2	Ashley edits in a special acknowledgement about her language to help the audience be mindful	Socio-Political	Acknowledgement	N/A
blkgirlfilmclub	BGFC02	48.00	Story Teller	Crowd-Backed	1	Discuss the setting of the film	Aesthetic	N/A	N/A
blkgirlfilmclub	BGFC02	51.00	Story Teller	Crowd-Backed	1	Reflect on the career and performance of the lead actor with factoids	Contextual	N/A	N/A
blkgirlfilmclub	BGFC02	58.00	Story Teller	Crowd-Backed	1	sharing their first experience and impressions of the film when it originally was released	Entertainment	N/A	N/A
blkgirlfilmclub	BGFC02	62.00	Story Teller	Crowd-Backed	1	Discuss the set design and production	Industry	N/A	N/A
blkgirlfilmclub	BGFC02	64.00	Story Teller	Crowd-Backed	2	Call back to previous episodes on class in films	N/A	Acknowledgement	N/A
blkgirlfilmclub	BGFC02	70.00	Story Teller	Crowd-Backed	1	Begin series of rich descriptions of the plot sequencing through major beats	Roast	N/A	N/A
blkgirlfilmclub	BGFC02	83.00	Story Teller	Crowd-Backed	1	Contextualizing the character of Catwoman's character within the narrative and scenes	Aesthetic	N/A	N/A
blkgirlfilmclub	BGFC02	92.00	Story Teller	Crowd-Backed	2	Acknowledge that this is just a podcast	N/A	Acknowledgement	N/A
blkgirlfilmclub	BGFC02	94.00	Story Teller	Crowd-Backed	1	Return to the descriptions of the scenes in narrative order and the sexual tensions in the film	Roast	N/A	N/A
blkgirlfilmclub	BGFC02	117.00	Story Teller	Crowd-Backed	1	Share the news about WB and Streaming and the movies they are excited for	Entertainment	N/A	N/A
blkgirlfilmclub	BGFC02	123.00	Story Teller	Crowd-Backed	1	Return to the narrative retelling through the end of the film	Roast	N/A	N/A
blkgirlfilmclub	BGFC02	135.00	Story Teller	Crowd-Backed	1	Consider the reception and production implications for the franchise	Industry	N/A	N/A
blkgirlfilmclub	BGFC02	138.00	Story Teller	Crowd-Backed	1	Provide final recommendations on seeing it	Entertainment	N/A	N/A
blkgirlfilmclub	BGFC02	142.00	Story Teller	Crowd-Backed	2	Read a listener letter about their Queen and Slim Episode with critique of their language on race	N/A	Direct Submission	N/A
blkgirlfilmclub	BGFC02	151.00	Story Teller	Crowd-Backed	2	Wrap Up and invite the listeners to contact them	Contextual	Invitation	N/A
blkgirlfilmclub	BGFC03	0.00	Story Teller	Crowd-Backed	1	Provide overview of the episode and the film with a music theme of the month	Contextual	N/A	N/A
blkgirlfilmclub	BGFC03	3.00	Story Teller	Crowd-Backed	1	Provide some context for the film around social media and celebrity culture	Socio-Political	N/A	N/A
blkgirlfilmclub	BGFC03	10.00	Story Teller	Crowd-Backed	1	Give the overall impressions and experience with the film-- hard to watch with trauma lens	Socio-Political	N/A	N/A
blkgirlfilmclub	BGFC03	17.00	Story Teller	Crowd-Backed	1	Recap the film with a loose plot and premese	Contextual	N/A	N/A
blkgirlfilmclub	BGFC03	19.00	Story Teller	Crowd-Backed	1	Provide comparisons and reference to the lead character and discuss the actress performance	Aesthetic	N/A	N/A
blkgirlfilmclub	BGFC03	26.00	Story Teller	Crowd-Backed	1	Describing the way narrative in detail with focus on cultural impacts of music	Socio-Political	N/A	N/A
blkgirlfilmclub	BGFC03	38.00	Story Teller	Crowd-Backed	1	Describing and explaining the setting, dialog, and costume design (as they retell the story)	Aesthetic	N/A	N/A
blkgirlfilmclub	BGFC03	59.00	Story Teller	Crowd-Backed	1	Diverge into a discussion about pop music and the taste cultures of music	Socio-Political	N/A	N/A
blkgirlfilmclub	BGFC03	66.00	Story Teller	Crowd-Backed	1	Back to the film with details from the scenes and dialog with focus on social representation in the narrative	Socio-Political	N/A	N/A
blkgirlfilmclub	BGFC03	93.00	Story Teller	Crowd-Backed	1	Reach the end of the narrative and provide recommendations with final thoughts	Entertainment	N/A	N/A
blkgirlfilmclub	BGFC03	100.00	Story Teller	Crowd-Backed	1	Consider the music industry and who they would like to interview	Contextual	N/A	N/A
blkgirlfilmclub	BGFC03	102.00	Story Teller	Crowd-Backed	1	Start the recommendation segment with other music movies to watch	Entertainment	N/A	N/A
blkgirlfilmclub	BGFC03	109.00	Story Teller	Crowd-Backed	2	Provide a trigger warning for next episode because film has flashing lights	N/A	Acknowledgement	N/A
blkgirlfilmclub	BGFC03	121.00	Story Teller	Crowd-Backed	1	wrap up with the standard thank you for listening	Contextual	Invitation	N/A
blkgirlfilmclub	BGFC03	122.00	Story Teller	Crowd-Backed	1	Sharing all the places to connect and visit	Contextual	Invitation	N/A

Looking at the *Mostly Nitpicking* discourse map, it has many white lines that visualize how many general topics that are not part of a pattern appear (the rambling conversations) and they have green in every episode show their consistent acknowledgment or inclusion of the audience. They did not directly read emails or provide voicemails, instead integrating more tweets or reviews into the conversation. And they always ended with a blue streak indicating their "classic segment" where they provide media recommendations to the listeners.

CaseID	Text ID	Time Stamps	Style	Backing	Preface	Topic Description	Evaluation	Audience Interaction	Market Integration
nitpickingpod	MNP01	0.00	Story Teller	Crowd-Backed	1	Intro with inside jokes about their life and bios	Contextual	N/A	N/A
nitpickingpod	MNP01	2.00	Story Teller	Crowd-Backed	1	Provide an overview of the film line-up for the next month of episodes	Contextual	N/A	N/A
nitpickingpod	MNP01	9.00	Story Teller	Crowd-Backed	1	Unpack the ending of Quibi services (a previous episode they did)	Industry	N/A	N/A
nitpickingpod	MNP01	17.00	Story Teller	Crowd-Backed	2	Nod to the spotify rankings and support they are getting on Twitter. They mention a few by handle	Contextual	Public Forum	N/A
nitpickingpod	MNP01	21.00	Story Teller	Crowd-Backed	1	Describing why this film was chosen (because it was so bad) as their impressions of it	Aesthetic	N/A	N/A
nitpickingpod	MNP01	35.00	Story Teller	Crowd-Backed	1	Provide the synopsis based on DJ and Diggins guessing the IMBD summary	Contextual	N/A	N/A
nitpickingpod	MNP01	38.00	Story Teller	Crowd-Backed	1	Unpack the context of the genre and similar films	Aesthetic	N/A	N/A
nitpickingpod	MNP01	43.00	Story Teller	Crowd-Backed	2	Mention having the movie playing in the background while they record	N/A	Acknowledgement	N/A
nitpickingpod	MNP01	44.00	Story Teller	Crowd-Backed	1	Break down aspects of the internal logic while moving scene by scene (starting with opening credits)	Roast	N/A	N/A
nitpickingpod	MNP01	57.00	Story Teller	Crowd-Backed	1	Discuss the history of Jiu Jitsu as a sport	Contextual	N/A	N/A
nitpickingpod	MNP01	61.00	Story Teller	Crowd-Backed	1	Questioning the use of subplot lines as function in the film with technical terms (exposition)	Aesthetic	N/A	N/A
nitpickingpod	MNP01	80.00	Story Teller	Crowd-Backed	1	Deeper interrogation of the weapons and the fight choreography	Roast	N/A	N/A
nitpickingpod	MNP01	96.00	Story Teller	Crowd-Backed	1	Critique the set design and editing techniques	Aesthetic	N/A	N/A
nitpickingpod	MNP01	141.00	Story Teller	Crowd-Backed	1	Provide their final recommendations that the experience was not very fun	Entertainment	N/A	N/A
nitpickingpod	MNP01	143.00	Story Teller	Crowd-Backed	1	Start the "classic segment" with recommendations for other media	Entertainment	N/A	N/A
nitpickingpod	MNP01	166.00	Story Teller	Crowd-Backed	1	Wrap up and plug their other content channels	Contextual	Invitation	N/A
nitpickingpod	MNP02	0.00	Story Teller	Crowd-Backed	1	Provide the intro and context for picking this film	Contextual	N/A	N/A
nitpickingpod	MNP02	1.00	Story Teller	Crowd-Backed	1	Share reactions to the news about WB/HBO Max deal	Industry	N/A	N/A
nitpickingpod	MNP02	5.00	Story Teller	Crowd-Backed	2	Acknowledge that they need to see the movies because they need content for the podcast	N/A	Acknowledgement	N/A
nitpickingpod	MNP02	16.00	Story Teller	Crowd-Backed	2	Read Reviews for the Podcast but dismiss the comments with little evidence of change from feedback loop	N/A	Public Forum	N/A
nitpickingpod	MNP02	17.00	Story Teller	Crowd-Backed	2	Expand on the Twitter discourses on bad movie theater experiences and home streaming	N/A	Public Forum	N/A
nitpickingpod	MNP02	35.00	Story Teller	Crowd-Backed	1	Transistion to the film conversation with context on the films series and production	Industry	N/A	N/A
nitpickingpod	MNP02	48.00	Story Teller	Crowd-Backed	1	Guess and then read the synopsis for the film	Contextual	N/A	N/A
nitpickingpod	MNP02	54.00	Story Teller	Crowd-Backed	1	Provide context on the characters and the actors performances with the writing	Aesthetic	N/A	N/A
nitpickingpod	MNP02	60.00	Story Teller	Crowd-Backed	1	Go around and share reactions and impressions	Entertainment	N/A	N/A
nitpickingpod	MNP02	67.00	Story Teller	Crowd-Backed	1	Interrogating the logic and validity of the premise and plot	Roast	N/A	N/A
nitpickingpod	MNP02	86.00	Story Teller	Crowd-Backed	2	Speak to the audience imagined from New Zealand	N/A	Acknowledgement	N/A
nitpickingpod	MNP02	94.00	Story Teller	Crowd-Backed	1	Critique of the lead actor's career and performances	Industry	N/A	N/A
nitpickingpod	MNP02	99.00	Story Teller	Crowd-Backed	1	Continue with the interrogation of specific scenes (in order of the film narrative)	Roast	N/A	N/A
nitpickingpod	MNP02	100.00	Story Teller	Crowd-Backed	2	Mention Mr. Sunday Movies, another YouTuber/Podcaster	N/A	Acknowledgement	N/A
nitpickingpod	MNP02	105.00	Story Teller	Crowd-Backed	1	Unpack the religious motifs in the film	Socio-Political	N/A	N/A
nitpickingpod	MNP02	117.00	Story Teller	Crowd-Backed	1	Return to the movie plot and the logic of the scenes	Roast	N/A	N/A
nitpickingpod	MNP02	155.00	Story Teller	Crowd-Backed	1	Pick up on a possible theme of body image and trans experiences as a reading	Socio-Political	N/A	N/A
nitpickingpod	MNP02	161.00	Story Teller	Crowd-Backed	1	Note the sound mixing issues in the film	Aesthetic	N/A	N/A
nitpickingpod	MNP02	166.00	Story Teller	Crowd-Backed	1	Share their meaning of Christmas movie genre	Industry	N/A	N/A
nitpickingpod	MNP02	169.00	Story Teller	Crowd-Backed	1	Classic Segment: Recommendations from the Group	Entertainment	N/A	N/A
nitpickingpod	MNP02	170.00	Story Teller	Crowd-Backed	2	Break the wall by DJ loading up Steam and starting to play a video game while recording	N/A	Acknowledgement	N/A
nitpickingpod	MNP02	192.00	Story Teller	Crowd-Backed	1	Wrap up and plug their other content channels	Contextual	N/A	N/A
nitpickingpod	MNP03	0.00	Story Teller	Crowd-Backed	1	Open with a reverse intro to roast the premise of the film from start	Entertainment	N/A	N/A
nitpickingpod	MNP03	2.00	Story Teller	Crowd-Backed	1	Discuss the Disney Stakeholder meeting with streaming line up with focus on cultural production	Industry	N/A	N/A
nitpickingpod	MNP03	20.00	Story Teller	Crowd-Backed	2	Let the audience know this is the no spoiler portion of the conversation	Contextual	Acknowledgement	N/A
nitpickingpod	MNP03	21.00	Story Teller	Crowd-Backed	1	Guess and then read the synopsis for the film	Contextual	N/A	N/A
nitpickingpod	MNP03	23.00	Story Teller	Crowd-Backed	1	Unpack the director style and career	Industry	N/A	N/A
nitpickingpod	MNP03	28.00	Story Teller	Crowd-Backed	1	Share takes on the Tom Cruise video about COVID	Contextual	N/A	N/A
nitpickingpod	MNP03	35.00	Story Teller	Crowd-Backed	1	Share opening impressions and thoughts with focus on experience "boring"	Entertainment	N/A	N/A
nitpickingpod	MNP03	47.00	Story Teller	Crowd-Backed	1	Unpack the characters with focus audience experience and expectations of genre	Entertainment	N/A	N/A
nitpickingpod	MNP03	59.00	Story Teller	Crowd-Backed	2	Telling the audience this is getting into spoilers and should see the movie then come back	N/A	Acknowledgement	N/A
nitpickingpod	MNP03	60.00	Story Teller	Crowd-Backed	1	Interrogate the plot and motivations by retelling the plot details in the scences (not linear but jumping)	Roast	N/A	N/A
nitpickingpod	MNP03	74.00	Story Teller	Crowd-Backed	2	Nando ate some food because he thought the hosts would talk more	N/A	Acknowledgement	N/A
nitpickingpod	MNP03	83.00	Story Teller	Crowd-Backed	2	Refer to themselves as podcast hosts and mention some reviews but dismiss the comments	N/A	Acknowledgement	N/A
nitpickingpod	MNP03	89.00	Story Teller	Crowd-Backed	1	Discuss the Director's career and what genres work or don't for him	Industry	N/A	N/A
nitpickingpod	MNP03	98.00	Story Teller	Crowd-Backed	1	Consider the problems with the plot details and holes	Roast	N/A	N/A
nitpickingpod	MNP03	102.00	Story Teller	Crowd-Backed	2	Acknowledge the purpose of the podcast and that they have only gotten through a few scenes	N/A	Acknowledgement	N/A
nitpickingpod	MNP03	103.00	Story Teller	Crowd-Backed	1	Move to retell the ABCs of the mainplot and explain the beats of the narrative with context and thoughts	Roast	N/A	N/A
nitpickingpod	MNP03	164.00	Story Teller	Crowd-Backed	1	Predict and ponder the Director's next move (a repeat from an earlier conversation)	Industry	N/A	N/A
nitpickingpod	MNP03	168.00	Story Teller	Crowd-Backed	1	Brainstorm what films they may do next week but don't share a definitive answer	Contextual	N/A	N/A
nitpickingpod	MNP03	174.00	Story Teller	Crowd-Backed	1	Start the "classic segment" with recommendations for other media	Contextual	N/A	N/A
nitpickingpod	MNP03	189.00	Story Teller	Crowd-Backed	1	Wrap up and plug their other content channels	Contextual	N/A	N/A
nitpickingpod	MNP04	0.00	Story Teller	Crowd-Backed	2	Call back to last episode and let us know that DJ does the editing	Contextual	Acknowledgement	N/A
nitpickingpod	MNP04	1.00	Story Teller	Crowd-Backed	1	Catch up with each other from the holidays	Contextual	N/A	N/A
nitpickingpod	MNP04	8.00	Story Teller	Crowd-Backed	1	Chat about the Mandolorian with critiques, pitching new plot ideas, actor career, predicting the next season	Industry	N/A	N/A
nitpickingpod	MNP04	42.00	Story Teller	Crowd-Backed	1	Introduce the film focused on the release strategy	Industry	N/A	N/A
nitpickingpod	MNP04	47.00	Story Teller	Crowd-Backed	1	Provide production context and who the writers are	Industry	N/A	N/A
nitpickingpod	MNP04	55.00	Story Teller	Crowd-Backed	1	Guess and then read the synopsis for the film	Contextual	N/A	N/A
nitpickingpod	MNP04	62.00	Story Teller	Crowd-Backed	1	Share their takes and impressions with an emphasis on siutating within culture	Roast	N/A	N/A
nitpickingpod	MNP04	72.00	Story Teller	Crowd-Backed	1	Unpack the character analysis with performance and logics of motivations	Roast	N/A	N/A
nitpickingpod	MNP04	82.00	Story Teller	Crowd-Backed	1	Discuss places where the film could be cut and edited	Aesthetic	N/A	N/A
nitpickingpod	MNP04	89.00	Story Teller	Crowd-Backed	1	Begin a retelling with the start of the movie and interrogate the mechanics and narrative structures	Roast	N/A	N/A
nitpickingpod	MNP04	127.00	Story Teller	Crowd-Backed	2	State that their job is to nitpick	N/A	Acknowledgement	N/A
nitpickingpod	MNP04	165.00	Story Teller	Crowd-Backed	1	Interrogate cheetah's character and decisions	Roast	N/A	N/A
nitpickingpod	MNP04	171.00	Story Teller	Crowd-Backed	1	Venture into a discussion of Aquaman villains and rank DC films by messyness	Contextual	N/A	N/A
nitpickingpod	MNP04	175.00	Story Teller	Crowd-Backed	1	Return to the movie plot and the logic of the scenes	Roast	N/A	N/A
nitpickingpod	MNP04	197.00	Story Teller	Crowd-Backed	1	Ponder if reshoots occurred based on the end of the movie and the release schedule	Industry	N/A	N/A
nitpickingpod	MNP04	205.00	Story Teller	Crowd-Backed	1	Make predictions for the third movie	Contextual	N/A	N/A
nitpickingpod	MNP04	208.00	Story Teller	Crowd-Backed	1	Start the classic segment with recommendations	Contextual	N/A	N/A
nitpickingpod	MNP04	221.00	Story Teller	Crowd-Backed	1	Wrap up the episode	Contextual	Invitation	N/A
nitpickingpod	MNP04	221.00	Story Teller	Crowd-Backed	2	Thanked the listeners and fans for the year	N/A	Acknowledgement	N/A

II. List of Films Mentioned

Films reviewed by the podcasts in this sample with the release year, director, MPAA rating, and summary from IMDB.

Bad Santa

- 2003
- Terry Zwigoff
- R

A miserable conman and his partner pose as Santa and his Little Helper to rob department stores on Christmas Eve. But they run into problems when the conman befriends a troubled kid.

Batman Returns

- 1992
- Time Burton
- PG-13

While Batman deals with a deformed man calling himself the Penguin wreaking havoc across Gotham with the help of a cruel businessman, a female employee of the latter becomes the Catwoman with her own vendetta.

Citizen Kane

- 1941
- Orson Welles
- PG

Following the death of publishing tycoon Charles Foster Kane, reporters scramble to uncover the meaning of his final utterance; 'Rosebud'.

Coco

- 2017
- Lee Unkrich and Adrian Molina
- PG

Aspiring musician Miguel, confronted with his family's ancestral ban on music, enters the Land of the Dead to find his great-great-grandfather, a legendary singer.

Ferris Bueller's Day Off

- 1986
- John Hughes
- PG-13

A high school wise guy is determined to have a day off from school, despite what the Principal thinks of that.

Her Smell

- 2018
- Alex Ross Perry
- R

A self-destructive punk rocker struggles with sobriety while trying to recapture the creative inspiration that led her band to success.

Jiu Jitsu

- 2020
- Dimitri Logothetis
- R

Every six years, an ancient order of jiu-jitsu fighters joins forces to battle a vicious race of alien invaders. But when a celebrated war hero goes down in defeat, the fate of the planet and mankind hangs in the balance.

Let Them Talk

- 2020
- Steven Soderbergh
- R

A famous author goes on a cruise trip with her friends and nephew in an effort to find fun and happiness while she comes to terms with her troubled past.

Ma Rainey's Black Bottom

- 2020
- George C. Wolfe
- R

Tensions rise when trailblazing blues singer Ma Rainey and her band gather at a recording studio in Chicago in 1927.

Mank

- 2020
- David Fincher
- R

1930's Hollywood is reevaluated through the eyes of scathing social critic and alcoholic screenwriter Herman J. Mankiewicz as he races to finish the screenplay of Citizen Kane (1941).

Mother!

- 2017
- Darren Aronofsky
- R

A couple's relationship is tested when uninvited guests arrive at their home, disrupting their tranquil existence.

Natural Born Killers

- 1994
- Oliver Stone
- R

Two victims of traumatized childhoods become lovers and psychopathic serial murderers irresponsibly glorified by the mass media.

Queen & Slim

- 2019
- Melina Matsoukas
- R

A couple's first date takes an unexpected turn when a police officer pulls them over.

Ready Player One

- 2018
- Steven Spielberg
- PG-13

When the creator of a virtual reality called the OASIS dies, he makes a posthumous challenge to all OASIS users to find his Easter Egg, which will give the finder his fortune and control of his world.

Scott Pilgrim vs. the World

- 2010
- Edgar Wright
- PG-13

In a magically realistic version of Toronto, a young man must defeat his new girlfriend's seven evil exes one by one in order to win her heart.

Small Axe (an anthology/collection of five films)

- 2020
- Steve McQueen
- TV-MA/R

Small Axe is based on the real-life experiences of London's West Indian community and is set between 1969 and 1982.

Soul

- 2020
- Pete Doctor and Kemp Powers
- PG

After landing the gig of a lifetime, a New York jazz pianist suddenly finds himself trapped in a strange land between Earth and the afterlife.

Tenet

- 2020
- Christopher Nolan
- PG-13

Armed with only one word, Tenet, and fighting for the survival of the entire world, a Protagonist journeys through a twilight world of international espionage on a mission that will unfold in something beyond real time.

The Christmas Chronicles: Part Two

- 2020
- Chris Columbus
- PG

Kate Pierce, now a cynical teen, is unexpectedly reunited with Santa Claus when a mysterious troublemaker threatens to cancel Christmas - forever.

The Midnight Sky

- 2020
- George Clooney
- PG-13

This post-apocalyptic tale follows Augustine, a lonely scientist in the Arctic, as he races to stop Sully and her fellow astronauts from returning home to a mysterious global catastrophe.

The Prom

- 2020
- Ryan Murphy
- PG-13

A troupe of hilariously self-obsessed theater stars swarm into a small conservative Indiana town in support of a high school girl who wants to take her girlfriend to the prom.

Wonder Woman 1984

- 2020
- Patty Jenkins
- PG-13

Diana must contend with a work colleague and businessman, whose desire for extreme wealth sends the world down a path of destruction, after an ancient artifact that grants wishes goes missing.

III.   Notes from the Academy Awards Coverage

Due to COVID-19, the 93ʳᵈ Academy Awards were held on April 25, 2021—nearly three months later than the typical early February run. The nominees were announced on March 15, 2021 (Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, 2021). The nominees for Best Picture were covered by a few of the audio critics, with a clear pattern emerging and distinguished through the organizational differences. *Pop Culture Happy Hour* covered every Best Picture nominee, situating their routines in alignment within canonical criticism focused on high-cultural awards. *The Big Picture* also covered most nominees, though from a more industry focused viewpoint, still aligning with journalist routines to share information about cultural news for Hollywood's biggest night. *Show Me the Meaning* discussed films that provided more salient socio-political themes as expected by their organization.

- **THE FATHER**: David Parfitt, Jean-Louis Livi and Philippe Carcassonne, Producers
  - Pop Culture Happy Hour on April 4, 2021
- **JUDAS AND THE BLACK MESSIAH**: Shaka King, Charles D. King and Ryan Coogler, Producers
  - Pop Culture Happy Hour on February 11, 2021
  - The Big Picture on February 11, 2021
  - Show Me the Meaning on April 23, 2021
- **MANK**: Ceán Chaffin, Eric Roth and Douglas Urbanski, Producers
  - Pop Culture Happy Hour on December 3, 2020
  - The Big Picture on December 4, 2020
- **MINARI**: Christina Oh, Producer
  - Pop Culture Happy Hour on February 25, 2021
  - The Big Picture on February 25, 2021
- **NOMADLAND**: Frances McDormand, Peter Spears, Mollye Asher, Dan Janvey and Chloé Zhao, Producers
  - Pop Culture Happy Hour on February 19, 2021
  - The Big Picture on February 25, 2021
  - Show Me the Meaning on April 30, 2021
- **PROMISING YOUNG WOMAN**: Ben Browning, Ashley Fox, Emerald Fennell and Josey McNamara, Producers
  - Pop Culture Happy Hour on January 18, 2021
  - The Big Picture on March 2, 2021
- **SOUND OF METAL**: Bert Hamelinck and Sacha Ben Harroche, Producers
  - Pop Culture Happy Hour on March 25, 2021
  - Black Girl Film Club on January 29, 2021
- **THE TRIAL OF THE CHICAGO 7**: Marc Platt and Stuart Besser, Producers
  - Pop Culture Happy Hour on October 15, 2020
  - The Big Picture on October 15, 2020

Not only did the legacy-backed critics review the nominees during independent episodes, but they also dedicated full episodes of rank and review or culture news styles that provided context to the awards for their audiences. *Pop Culture Happy Hour* released six episodes on Oscar coverage and *The Big Picture* released five episodes about the 2021 Oscars with an additional three episodes of related content discussing previous or "alternate" Academy Awards. They offered pre-show context and post-show explanations for their audiences: each from their own critical niche with *PCHH* focused more on the texts themselves as canonical interpreters and *TBP* from an industry production lens as technical context-traditional. The audio critics situated within crowd-backed organizations did not cover the Academy Awards as consistently. *Show Me the Meaning* covered two of the Best Picture nominees, including the winner after the award show had aired. *Black Girl Film Club* covered one Best Picture Nominee before it had been announced as a nomination. After the award show aired, *PCHH* and *TBP* explicitly shared that they watched the telecast and they provided a review and discussion of what happened for their audiences. The visible influence of legacy-backed organizations on the coverage of the critical event warrants further exploration. Clearly, those closer to the industry and canonical criticism are more likely to discuss "Hollywood's Biggest night," even as the social relevancy and acceptance of the show is an authority in culture wanes. A long-term study to follow how legacy-backed audio critics discuss the Oscars through the level of social influence may provide insight on those social and cultural shifts after #OscarSoWhite and another award show disinterest.

I listened to the episodes of the Best Picture winner, <u>Nomadland</u>, from each of the audio critics who covered the film to compare the style and routines: *The Big Picture, Pop Culture Happy Hour*, and *Show Me the Meaning*. Each audio critic remained consistent with their situation in the larger criticism landscape by discussing the film through their niche lenses. *The Big Picture* spent 19 minutes talking among Sean, Amanda, and Chris Ryan on the narrative successes for the film through the lens of production. Their conversation revolved around how the film used "real-life" actors to create narrative impact and most how the film was distributed and marketed. At nine minutes into the conversation, the

talk of distribution and promotion is most robust, and that conversation thread returns at the end of the review with Spotlight's marketing:

> *It is a true story, and they inserted a fictional character into it, and it is like a tremendously famous Hollywood actress who does, I think, an extraordinary job of letting the real-life actors kind of take the stage and just kind of being a conduit for the audience in a way that maybe we wouldn't have if it were just a documentary. Or I don't know. I think it is like an interesting story-telling choice. But is it as straight-forward a political document as some people might want? No. And did Searchlight send out like weird grocery boxes, that I didn't receive, you know to promote this story about retirees who are living in their vans due to the economic crisis of 2008? Yes, they did. So, a lot to unpack.*

Pop Culture Happy Hour spent 15 minutes conversing among Glen, Linda, and Aisha with most focus on the narrative successes via the performance. They talked most about how the film works for them and emoted. They placed the film in context of the Oscars with more discussion on the editing to create a compelling narrative and pacing. After embedding pieces of the film's audio into the podcast, the *PCHH* hosts took time to explain the significance of the performance and the choices that led to the emotions the film produced. Nearly eight minutes into the conversation, Aisha exemplifies how the conversation felt and focused on at large.

> *I think, you know after hearing that clip of Swanky talking, that to me was one of the things that really stood out. And I didn't know this until after the first time I watched the film but knowing afterwards that some of these characters were not actors. That they were themselves, you could really tell that in just the very plaintive way of speaking. That I really appreciate. It felt like at times, like I could have been dropped into the middle of an Errol Morris documentary and I was listening to one of those characters really speak like they normally would. Like there are no put-upon errors. And so, hearing them tell these stories just really really worked for me, and I really enjoyed it.*

Show Me the Meaning spent 50 minutes among Michael, Raymond, and Austin talking about the narrative successes via artistic realism and how the film connects to socio-political contexts in culture. They spent much of the conversation comparing the narrative devices used in <u>Nomadland</u> to other films and art-forms with the use of art in life at the forefront. They used terms like "derivative" and described the film as poetic realism throughout the discussion with many academic and multi-syllabic words as exemplified by their overview, eight minutes into the review:

I think we can explore some of the potentially problematic glamorization of certain aspects of capitalism and the Amazon warehouse I have heard people talking about. But I think we should also kind of explore the beauty of trying to connect. And trying to find home and trying to put the pieces back together. There are some lovely illusions to westerns, to Ophelia, there are some lovely musings on poetry. There is also something interesting in this being a powerful feminist film. This is a feminist, maybe revisionist retelling of a pioneering expansion into the wild, but without it being that Reese Witherspoon type where you are going out there to sentimentally find yourself. Or Eat Pray Love. You know it is something a bit more earthen and beautifully tragic.

Each of the audio critics functioned as context-traditional to provide information and insight on the film rather than retelling the story to the audience. The critics provided their opinions and some recommendations for the audience in line with their routines. While all three critics are situated within the context-traditional sphere, they diverged in their critical niches and purposes by describing the same movie, and often the same scenes, through clearly different lenses. *The Big Picture* spoke towards an insider niche by emphasizing the production and distribution systems, *Pop Culture Happy Hour* praised the pacing and performances through a canonical lens of evaluating the artistic text and *Show Me the Meaning* reflected the conceptual niche as they connected social and cultural concepts to the film with philosopher citations and theory. All three provide a listener with a different review experience of the same film, demonstrating the influence of the organization on the routines of discourse.

IV. Partner Podcast

As part of the experience and spirit of podcast, and common among podcast researchers, I recorded a partner podcast and audio reflection of the dissertation. The podcast is located at www.hylyb.com and produced/distributed through the Anchor platform.

Content Schedule

Part and Title	Topic
Part 1	Reflection on Prelim
Part 2	History of Broadcast/Positioning Myself in Media scholarship
Part 3	Discussion of the Research and Findings