

DIGITAL BRAND MANAGEMENT STRATEGY:
TEXAS IMPROV COMEDY CLUBS

by

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INTRODUCTION

Digital media threatens the profits of the entertainment industry. The variety of options offered by digital platforms such as Netflix, Hulu, and YouTube introduces new competitors to physical entertainment venues, such as comedy clubs. IBIS World Report suggests that the comedy club industry generates \$315.1 million annually in the United States. However, while the industry itself is growing, digital entertainment venues (e.g., Netflix, Hulu, Vimeo, and YouTube) threaten the future of physical stand-up clubs (Edwards, 2015). This potential substitute has left stand-up comedy clubs, like the Texas Improv Comedy Clubs, questioning if they can maintain their brand identity, while potentially leveraging new media to their advantage.

Overview

In 1963, the Improvisation Comedy Club, or Improv, started in New York City by Budd Friedman as a venue for Broadway performers to relax after their shows. The Improv transitioned to a comedy venue in 1964 as comics began practicing material in front of the iconic red brick wall. The list of popular and famous comedians that performed at the Improv only grew, which made it the premiere venue for stand-up; ultimately resulting in the expansion of the brand across the country (“History,” 2016). Today, the Texas Improv Comedy Clubs operate in Addison, Arlington, and Houston, which represent three of the 22 subsidiaries to the Improv, brand.

The Texas Improv Comedy Clubs recognize the potential threat presented by digital media. Sean Traynor, Texas Improv Marketing and Corporate Manager, manages the brand identity through both traditional and digital media channels. Traynor’s single-handedly manages

the use of social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram, amongst the traditional media channels. However, given the current customer landscape, digital platforms might help maintain Texas Improv's strong brand identity. With the proper dialogue created through social media channels such as Facebook, Traynor can actively engage with the comedy club consumers. Moreover, due to the hybrid nature of a comedy venue and possible future competitors, the digital media consumption for the target audience must first be evaluated.

The product that the Improv Comedy Club provides the entertainment landscape is live entertainment, usually in the form of touring comedians. A comic typically performs up to six shows, Thursday through Sunday, for a single weekend before leaving to a new venue in a different town. He or she might not return to the same venue for another year, which makes informing the audience imperative to delivering this service (Traynor, 2016).

The admission's ticket price (\$15-50/person) provides the audience admittance, with the understanding that here is a two-item (food or drinks) minimum per person once the audience gets into the show. Because most comedy shows are 21+, the audiences admitted tend to generate a large percent of sales towards alcoholic beverages. Edwards (2015) details that the distribution of revenue due to alcohol (39%) is greater than the income from ticket sales (33%), making a comedy club as much a bar as it is an entertainment venue.

Given the nature of where stand-up comedy clubs fall within the entertainment landscape, it is imperative that Traynor utilizes his resources efficiently and effectively. Spredfast, Sprinklr, and Percolate are technology start-ups that aim to provide a digital brand management solution, but while they deliver results, they also carry a high price tag. For this reason, Traynor opts towards more cost effective software such as Google Analytics, Buffer, and Facebook Analytics. However, as the landscape continues to evolve an understanding of the digital audience presents

an opportunity for the Texas Improv Comedy Clubs. This project is designed to build understanding of the digital needs of the Texas Improv Comedy Clubs, while suggesting a strategy to maintain a strong brand identity on social media.

To this end, first, a situation analysis is conducted to understand the competitive landscape and expose any direct and ancillary rivals. Second, a content analysis of the Houston, Addison, and Arlington Improv Facebook pages will evaluate the current social media presence and brand engagement. Finally, a survey conducted through the Facebook pages of the Improv venues will not only represent the consumer motivations of Improv Comedy Club patrons, but will also evaluate social media behaviors for this digital audience. After collecting this information, a strategy based on the research will be developed for the Texas Improv Comedy Clubs brand.

SITUATION ANALYSIS

The Texas Improv Comedy Clubs operate within the entertainment industry. According to IBIS World Report (2015), the comedy club industry generates \$315.1 million annually in the United States. Collectively, the Addison and Arlington Improvs, Backdoor Comedy Club, three Hyena's venues (Dallas, Plano, and Fort Worth), and the Dallas Comedy House make up the local DFW comedy industry. However, like the rest of the country, Dallas-Fort Worth has a thriving comedy scene with no specific market leader.

This ambiguity represents the strength and a weakness of the industry. Entertainment wise, stand-up comedy is categorized as "live theater," expanding the competitors to include The Granada Theater, The Kessler, and other performance art venues; locations which have hosted comedians who draw larger crowds for one-night-only shows. Even venues typically recognized

for other entertainment options, such as the American Airlines Center, House of Blues, and the Verizon Theater, have hosted traveling comedians and accommodate larger audiences. Due to limitations of this research, these alternative venues to comedy clubs will be collectively analyzed as large venues with the potential to host comedians, as their purpose is not predominantly stand-up. Furthermore, these larger venues share the previously mentioned characteristic by serving alcoholic beverages throughout the performance (Hoover's, 2015; Wilson, 2011).

As Edwards (2015) identified, digital platforms such as Hulu, Netflix, Vimeo, and YouTube might represent an alternative to live performances, but this research will look to validate this threat within the digital platform. By providing an understanding of the digital audience choosing to interact with the Texas Improv Comedy Clubs on Facebook, this research will allow the Improv to know whether the threat of digital media platforms could potentially drive customers to this alternative.

With a diverse competitive landscape, the Texas Improv Comedy Club operates within a highly competitive industry (Table 1.1). The consumer capital is stratified into admission (33%), food and soft drink (14.1%) alcoholic beverages (39%), and "other", such as merchandise (13.9%), making low barriers of entry for more competitors and increasing the number of hybrid venues (Figure 1). In fact, previous literature also recognizes bars as

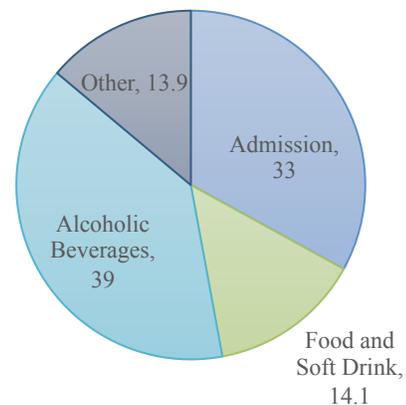


Figure 1 – Percentage Share of Revenue for Comedy Club Venues

competing venues, with potential comics, simply for the ability to hold an audience and purchase alcohol (Lockyer & Myers, 2011).

Table 1.1 – Competitive Landscape

Hyena’s Comedy Clubs

- *Product:* 21+ Comedy Show
- *Price:* Free Wednesday, \$15-30/person
- *Promotion:* Old digital presence, website, Facebook account, Twitter Account
- *Place:* Dallas, Plano, & Fort Worth

Backdoor Comedy Club

- *Product:* 18+ CLEAN Comedy Show
- *Price:* Free Thursday, \$22/person
- *Promotion:* Advertises on Facebook during New Year’s and Valentine’s Day, discounted tickets on goldstar.com & yipit.com
- *Place:* Dallas

Dallas Comedy House

- *Product:* 18+ Improv and Comedy Shows
- *Price:* \$10-15 / person
- *Promotion:* Website, Facebook, Facebook sponsored ads, Twitter, Instagram, YouTube, LinkedIn, Google+, & Pinterest
- *Place:* Dallas

Large Venues (potentially w/ Comics)

- *Product:* Comedy, Music, and Sport events
- *Price:* \$25-500+ /person (varies)
- *Promotion:* Facebook sponsored ads, Facebook events, websites, Ticketmaster, StubHub, LiveNation, SeatGeek,
- *Place:* Dallas, Arlington, Grand Prairie, Fort Worth, Denton,

Based on the magnitude of potential competitors, this research will focus on direct competitors – those venue which self-identify as comedy clubs – while categorizing hybrid competitors as “large venues” (Table 1.1). In 2011, Lockyer and Myers conducted a survey focusing on the audience perspective at different comedy club venues and found that while

audiences understand the appeal of larger venues, patrons prefer the small and intimate comedy club. However, on any given day, these venues represent alternative options for the consumer, making the understanding of how a comedy club position's themselves digitally important for this research.

In understanding the patron of a comedy club, general knowledge of the venue's products is required. The previously mentioned distribution for consumer spending (Figure 1) is significant in that it showcases the consumption behavior of the audience in shows. Given the significance of alcoholic beverages in the venue, in understanding the demographics of the general audience it is imperative to recognize those individuals attending shows as similar to those visiting a bar or club.

According to research collected by Mediamark University Reporter (2016) in the spring of 2014, the indexes for consumers who frequent bars or clubs at least once a month make up a very affluent population. Demographic characteristics include: working professionals (Index=163) or employees in business operations (Index=160), who are typically male (Index=119), with a college degree or higher (Index=155), whose ages range from 25-44 (Index=182/122). A survey conducted in the United Kingdom in 2011 supported these demographic statistics in comedy clubs, reporting that not only were the majority of respondents educated males, but also suggesting that these patrons preferred to attend shows with friends or partners (Quick, S., 2011).

Finally, MRI+ confirms Traynor's suspicion that the desired audience is digitally engaged. Nearly every website on the report recorded an index of 100 or higher, making digital media a possible channel to communicate with this audience, and thus supporting the importance

in research regarding a digital brand management strategy for the Texas Improv Comedy Clubs (Mediamark, 2016).

However, this quantitative data does not reflect previous literature in regards to the digital brand management of comedy clubs, nor does it demonstrate the motivations of the consumers visiting these venues. For this reason, the following section will address industry-conducted research in further identifying the physical and digital audiences, deconstructing the appeal of the venue itself, as well as highlighting potential consumer motivation theories that may help communicators understand how to cater a digital presence to comedy club digital audiences.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Digital brand management involves two concepts: the brand and the audience perception. Dealing with digital platforms, this perception will be created by previous experiences within the venue, as well as opinions on social media and Internet-based channels. To understand the potential brand identity, following section will review previous literature about the venue itself. Following this evaluation, previous literature will be explored in describing the venue itself and the strengths and weakness of the digital audience. This will help in identifying how the product, stand-up comedy, is experienced in both the digital and physical realms. Finally, this paper will use research in consumer motivation theories to identify possible ethical and theoretical implications created by the current digital media strategy.

The Venue

Typically with an intimate room, small tables, tightly packed seats, and a close proximity to the stage, the comedy club is designed to help the audience feel like they are a part of the

action (Wilson, 2011; Quirk, 2011). Formally established in 1966, a comedy club is described as a location conducive to allowing “a speaker facing an audience [...] to be perceived as humorous” (Wilson, 2011, p.277). It is not often considered a comfortable environment; however, even with few decorations, the décor does aim to achieve a specific purpose. It is unlikely that the venue will evoke any glamorous thoughts, primarily because the experience is to resemble that of a friend telling jokes (Quirk, 2011; Figure 2).

The venue does, however, leave lasting impressions on the audience. Those club-goers end up remembering their proximity to the performer as well as any participation that is provided (or avoided) by such proximity (Lockyer et al., 2011). A full-house audience in a smaller room evokes a different impression than does a larger room with smaller audience (Quirk, 2011). Comedy relies heavily on the audience interacting with each other over the course of the performance. The participants decide the energy of the room.



Figure 2 – Example of Improv Venue

Quirk (2011) stated, “the room is a variable factor, and it is an integral part of the comedian’s craft to adapt around its specific demands” (p.223). These words suggest that the comedy club acts as the conduit by which a message is conveyed. The purpose of a comedy club

is to provide entertainment through humor; however, a humorist, such as a comic, is challenged with creating a message that resonates with a large amount of people (Scarpetta & Spagnolli, 2009; Thomas, 2015). This challenge is further enhanced by diverse audience interest. Such diversity is why the comedy club consumer requires specific attention for the venue to maintain a strong brand image.

Physical Audience

The audience at a comedy club is equally as important as the comedian and venue. When interviewed, comedians credit the audience as a means of motivation for a good performance (Quirk, 2011; Lockyer & Myers, 2011). For the club itself, the audience represents consumers and promoters (Wilson, 2011). An audience that enjoys the comedian will follow the direction the entertainer's content guides, consume more food and drinks, and then recommend the experience to others. Wilson (2011) recognizes this as a form of rhetoric or "the idea that sometimes an event (practice, subject, institution, and so on) provokes us to call into question what we think we know; we then reconsider how we understand it, and thus we rush to explain it to ourselves and to each other" (p.278). "If you have to explain a joke, it's not funny" (Wilson, 2011, p.286). When a joke is fully conceptualized by the comedian, his or her rhetoric is successful when the people sitting in the seats can connect the dots.

Communicating with the appropriate audience is imperative to the success of the talent at a comedy club. Quirk (2011) interviewed comedians to conclude that the best audiences are often physically uncomfortable, usually due to small tables, close seating, and simple rooms. Her research also acknowledged that a full room is not often the most "comically savvy" audience, recognizing the importance of reaching the correct people for the entertainer (p.233). This

finding is further supported by Lockyer et al. (2011), who reported that distinct differences exist between audiences with different cultural understandings (p.168). Lockyer's research suggest that a mutual understanding is established between comedy club patrons, regardless of demographics and culture. Moreover, Lockyer et al.'s research sought to find the motivations and appeal of stand up comedy to their audience. Their 2011 research found that the audience wants to collectively follow the performance, making it a "social contract" between the performer and the crowd, as in, "audiences must first have a shared understanding in relation to what is comic, or not – without shared understanding between the joke tellers and the audiences shared laughter is unlikely to be expected" (Lockyer et al., 2011, p.182). Live comedy creates a temporary community of likeminded individuals due to proximity and comic intelligence.

Digital Audience

In Lockyer et al.'s 2011 study on comedy club *audience*, the research determined five main themes of appeal for this performance art: "respecting the stand-up comedian; expecting the unexpected; proximity and intimacy; opportunities for interaction; and sharing the comic experience" (183). This is significant literature because characteristics such as opportunities for interaction, proximity, and intimacy are unlikely to be transferred to the digital experience. Quirk (2011) further supports the hypothesis that the venue itself is imperative in calculating the audience's willingness to participate.

It is nearly impossible for a digital viewer to interact with the comedian through a YouTube video, besides through message boards (Wilson, 2011, p.283). While the camerawork may be able to provide close-ups of facial expressions, the audience is still not in the proper mindset to fully enjoy a stand-up performance, and thus the appeal of the comedy club venue

remains significant. Considering that comedians' full performances can sometimes be viewed on digital platforms such as comedycentral.com, Netflix, Hulu, and YouTube, the draw to see the live performance would reflect the possibility of needing original content to engage on social media. By understanding the difference in the experiences of the digital and physical audiences, this given research suggests that the Texas Improv Comedy Clubs require separate analysis from traditional media, yielding the first research questions for this study.

RQ1: How do the Texas Improv Comedy Clubs communicate with the digital audience on social media?

RQ2a: Is the current strategy generating audience engagement?

RQ2b: Do the Texas Improv Comedy Clubs take advantage of digital engagement opportunities?

Theoretical Foundation for Research

Studies on online engagement in humor within social media have used several theories to understand audience motivation to attend comedy clubs. This research will compare the different consumer motivational factors when choosing television, live performance, and social media. Once data is collected this research will evaluate the findings to see whether these consumer theories support the data collected through the research.

Uses and Gratifications Theory

The Uses and Gratifications theory (U&G) “views media as some of the means through which people actively and consciously attempt to meet their personal and social needs and desires” (Meyrowitz, 2008, p. 642). This thought applies to how the consumer decision of which

entertainment options answers his or her need for satisfaction. The gratifications aspect stems from seven variations of satisfaction: information, entertainment, warranty, value addition, reassurance, experience, and involvement (O'Donohoe, 1994). This research will use previous studies in uses and gratifications to identify favorable traits presented by the entertainment style that can be used in the Texas Improv Comedy Clubs digital media strategy.

Early research in television recognizes two types of television motivators: entertainment and information, echoing the separate satisfiers of U&G (Rubin, 1983). Modern studies contradict this research, finding instead that audiences look towards entertainment within the informative news, especially in relationship to satirical news and elections (Feldman & Young, 2008; Feldman, 2013). This important research suggests that based on the U&G theory, comedy communications within traditional media satisfies multiple gratifications for the user.

Comparatively, research within new media has changed the location of the audience. Rather than being stationary, such as the audience of traditional media, the audience within new media is "active" and thus plays a dynamic role in the decision process (Sundar & Limperos, 2013). Having this type of audience changes the context by which the user makes a decision. In fact, technology itself can be a source of gratification (Sundar et al., 2013). Research conducted within U&G and new media will help me evaluate how the Texas Improv has been able to reach and connect with their audiences. Furthermore, using previous research within U&G will allow my research the ability to identify how the audience is motivated to attend a comedy club.

Elaboration Likelihood Model

The elaboration likelihood model focuses on the factors that persuade consumers, typically in advertising (Lien, 2001). Lien (2001) divided ELM into three occurrences based off

antecedents, precedents, and processing cues, focusing on “the extent to which people think about issue-relevant arguments contained in persuasive messages” (p.303).

This theory relates to this research by reflecting the means by which the audience receives the message and how that advertisement appeals to the general masses (Rehman & Viash, 2013). Rehman and Viash (2013) stress that visual cues are essential to activating a consumer’s ability to recall necessary details on digital media. According to Rehman and Viash’s research (2013), the traditional model does not allow for the exposures to be as frequent as those on the digital platform. Establishing the need for the digital landscape to be further researched in order to motivate and persuade the audience to visit the venue. With an understanding of the most persuasive messages posted on the Facebook and Twitter pages, Traynor will be able to use the social media landscape to persuade the digital audience to buy tickets to the venue.

RQ3: What motivates the digital audience to visit a comedy club?

RQ4: What digital messages influence audience attendance?

RQ5: How and when does the digital audience use social media?

METHOD

This research was conducted through the bilateral execution of two research methods. First, this study used a content analysis of the Addison and Houston Improvs’ Facebook posts, to determine the current digital media strategy and the engagement with their audience. Using a coding sheet designed from previous literature in entertainment, the content analysis uncovered trends developing within the digital landscape. Second, a survey was administered through the Addison, Arlington, and Houston Improv’s Facebook fan pages. By reaching out to the audience

directly, this method examined consumer motivation for attending a stand-up comedy show and mapped a general understanding of the virtual audience's digital media habits. The overall goal of this approach was to develop a digital engagement strategy for the Texas Improv Comedy Clubs through social media.

Content Analysis

The Addison, Arlington, and Houston Improvs have over 100,000 Facebook fans, collectively. The goal of the content analysis will be to identify the current digital media strategy from the digital audience's point of view. The evaluation of method will be created based off previous research in social media engagement strategy, while addressing RQs 1 and 2. The content analysis will look to explore the possibility of a preferred social media engagement approach, when interacting with the virtual audience.

Procedure: Aiming to simplify this assessment, the overall content of the post will be divided into four different categories: disclosure, information, interactivity/involvement, and reposts. "Disclosure" relates to posts about the organization, its history, and any mission statements. "Information" refers to the dissemination of news, visual fliers, and links to upcoming or current events. "Interactivity/Involvement" suggests open-ended posts, comments, games, or feedback opportunities. Finally, "Retweets/Reposts" are content that was not created by the Improv, but rather found externally and shared on the Improv's Facebook page for commentary (See Appendix for coding sheet).

Based on the results of this content analysis, this research will identify possible trends, recognize significant strategies, as well as record any opportunities for modification in digital

tactics in Facebook posts. Considering the potential volume of fans hopefully being reached by these posts, having a targeted digital media strategy will allow the Texas Improv Comedy Clubs to better utilize social media as a communication tool.

Survey

A survey is the best method to directly engage with the digital audience, which is why it is included in this research. By allowing for feedback to be provided from the consumer, this study will address consumer motivation strategies for the Texas Improv Comedy Clubs. Moreover, this research will also include questions that collectively identify the comedy club patron to discuss their personal media network – directly relating to when they are most commonly using digital or social media platforms. This method will answer RQs 3,4, and 5.

This research will first borrow methods from the uses and gratifications research of Alan Rubin (1983) within television motivation. Using a 5-point Likert scale (strongly disagree, disagree, neutral, agree, strongly agree), the survey will provide a quantitative result of consumer motivation in choosing an entertainment venue. Considering the hybrid nature of a comedy club – part entertainment show and part bar – this research will be able to distinguish how events should be positioned to consumers within the digital landscape. Questions from the research of S. Shyam Sundar and Anthony Limperos (2013) provide the format for distinguishing the positive aspects of the technology medium, research that also stemmed from uses and gratifications theory.

Furthermore, this survey will include questions modeled off Lockyer and Myer's (2011) research on the venue. The resulting data will either support or deny the comedy club environment as an imperative asset to the stand-up comedy experience. The main products

provided by the Texas Improv Comedy Clubs are the venue and the comedy experience. Given the imposing threat of the digital alternative, this research looks to evaluate the importance of the physical product to the consumers who engage on with the Texas Improv Comedy Clubs on the digital platform.

Finally, this research evaluates the current engagement level of the Improv with their digital audience by evaluating the response rate of the Facebook Fans. Given that the post will include an incentive of four free tickets to a non-special show, the response rate versus the total number of fans can be used as a reflection of the engagement levels of the Improv.

Timeline

The content analysis will evaluate Facebook posts from the Houston and Addison Improvs starting October 2015 and ending January 2016, as they represent two thirds of the current digital media strategy given the timeframe limitations of this research. This evaluation will be conducted in March of 2016, concurrently with the survey is being administered, as to not bias the questions regarding the platform based off current strategy. The survey will be posted on the Houston, Addison, and Arlington Facebook pages, as well as this best represents the current digital audience. These individuals have chosen to interact with the Improv, while also choosing to have a unique digital media presence. As an added incentive, participants who choose to answer the survey received four free tickets to a non-special comedy show. The survey results will be collected and analyzed through Qualtrics.

RESULTS

The results are divided up into two categories: digital audience engagement and digital audience motivation. Digital audience engagement will address research questions 1 and 2, while digital audience motivation will relate to research questions 3 through 5.

Audience Engagement on Social Media

RQ1: How do the Texas Improv Comedy Clubs communicate with the digital audience on social media?

Starting with the content analysis, the Addison and Houston Improvs primarily utilized engagement in informational dialogue (77.2%) with their digital audience (n= 409). Typically non-original content, the Improvs preferred posting a photo or video with supporting text (50.5% / 26%). Surprisingly, profile picture changes received a higher amount of engagement than most posts. However, sponsored advertisements received far more engagements than traditional posts. The results suggest that the Improvs are not lacking in quantity of posts. In fact, on October 7th, 2015, the Houston Improv posted fifteen separate updates, with only one post receiving likes, comments, and shares greater than the average (m=23), referred to as engagements (Table 2.1).

The Houston Improv is a good example of social media confusion, because their Facebook content is generated through a connection with their Twitter handle. While convenient and seemingly effective with non-original content such as memes and gifs, with informational content from the Improv, the results do not translate. Given that the content originates from a

separate platform, # and @ add clutter to the visual ultimately resulting in hiding the buying option.

Overall, all three venues use the # (hashtag) and @ (at) shortcuts on their Facebook pages. This social media confusion distracts from the content, especially when not native to the platform. While @IAmChrisPorter directly links to comedian Chris Porter's Twitter page, it does little to nothing on Facebook. Given that social media is used to encourage engagement, social media confusion is unappealing, making the informational content lost in the clutter.

RQ2a: Is the current strategy generating audience engagement?

RQ2b: Does the Texas Improv Comedy Clubs take advantage engagement opportunities?

One goal of this project was to identify missed engagement opportunities, defined by this research as consumer generated dialogue. This ranges from a photo posted on a post complimenting the venue on a great show or a direct question asked (Figure 3). An opportunity identified from this evaluation, The Houston Improv posted over one third of their content over a four-month sample in October alone (N=110). This research uncovered twelve missed engagement opportunities, including three questions asked by consumers, which went unanswered (Figure 3) This trend increased in that the Houston Improv missed 45 possible engagements for all four months (n=284), making the percent of possible engagements 15% (See Table 2.1).

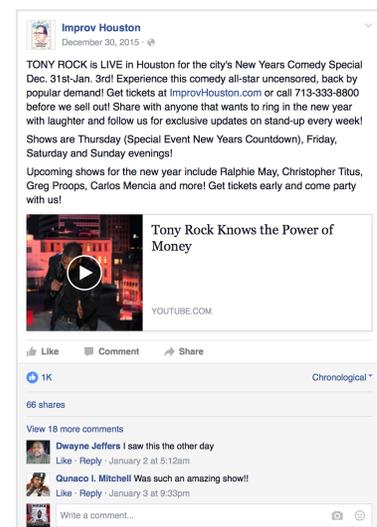


Figure 3 – Example of Missed Engagement Opportunity

Table 2.1
Comparison of Content on Improv Facebook Pages (N=408)

	Houston Improv n=284		Addison Improv n=124		Total n= 408	
Type of Media						
Text and Photo	145	51.1%	61	49.2%	206	50.5%
Text and Video	72	25.4%	34	27.4%	106	26.0%
Photo	21	7.4%	18	14.5%	39	9.6%
Text	29	10.2%	5	4.0%	34	8.3%
Video	3	1.1%	6	4.8%	9	2.2%
Purchase Option						
Yes	92	32.3%	46	37.1%	138	33.8%
No	192	67.6%	78	62.9%	270	66.2%
Post Content						
Information	224	78.8%	91	73.4%	315	77.2%
Retweet/Repost	34	12.0%	22	17.7%	56	13.7%
Interactivity/Involvement	21	7.4%	9	7.3%	30	7.4%
Disclosure	5	1.7%	2	1.6%	7	1.7%
Missed Opportunities	45	15.8%	20	16.1%	65	15.9%
Engagements						
Likes	23 likes / post		38 likes / post		27 likes / post	
Comments	2 comments / post		2 comments / post		2 comments / post	
Shares	4 shares / post		4 shares / post		4 shares / post	

Thus far, this research has primarily focused on the Houston Improv's volume of posts, however the opportunity echoed in the Addison Improv. Out of 124 posts, the Addison venue missed twenty possible engagements during the four-month time frame, equating to a 16% possible conversion rate. Collectively, out of 408 posts, 14% of the posts offered an opportunity for the Improv to engage with their audience that went unanswered.

What the Addison Improv proved is that quantity of posts does not outweigh quality in this sample. For example, text with photo outweighed any other type of media with 206 posts

collectively. To start, out of an overall sample of 408, roughly half of the posts on both pages included both an image and descriptive texts; for Houston 145 of their 284 posts were photo and text (51%), while Addison used 61 of their 124 posts (49.2%). However, Addison generated an average of 44 engagements per post, compared to Houston's 29 likes, comments, or shares. Meaning, while Houston posted more often, Addison did greater with less. This suggests that frequency does not encourage engagement.

One interesting result of the research deals with the disclosure category of posts. Both the Addison and Houston websites utilized Facebook to express open employment opportunities at the venues. The post dated January 18, 2016, received 575 likes, 108 comments, and 310 shares, from the Houston Improv. Comparatively, when posted on January 24, 2016, the Addison Improv post received 201 likes, 22 comments, and 94 shares. While both were sponsored advertisements, the posts might suggest an interest in the fan perspective of the disclosure category. Fans of the Improv are not only interested in becoming employees, but also they are intrigued by the behind the scenes aspect of the entertainment venue. This is also significant given that similar insight is not openly found in digital alternatives. Insight into the interworking of the venue might differentiate their content with posts that fans are interested in, while potentially advertising for employment opportunities without a sponsorship.

Digital Audience Motivation

The digital audience sampled (N=112) through the survey posted on the Facebook pages of the Addison, Arlington, and Houston Improv Comedy Clubs. Based on optional demographic questions the responses were comprised of males (37.3%) and females (62.7%); African American or Caucasian (80.4%); ages 22 through 60 (average age: 35-years-old); with the

majority of the respondents coming from households with an annual income between \$25,000 and \$99,999 (81.3%) who are either working towards or have completed an undergraduate program (71.4%). This sample reflected the previous literature and situation analysis, apart from the male to female ratio (See Table 3.1).

TABLE 3.1
Survey Demographic Representation (N=112)

Sex			Highest Education		
Female	69	61.6%	Below High School	0	0%
Male	41	36.6%	High School	11	9.8%
			Some Undergraduate	40	35.7%
			Undergraduate Degree	40	35.7%
			Graduate School	19	17.0%
Age			Ethnicity		
21-29	30	26.8%	Caucasian	29	25.9%
30-39	53	47.3%	Asian or Pacific Islander	3	2.7%
40-49	18	16.1%	African American	61	54.5%
50+	9	8.0%	Hispanic	8	7.1%
			Native American or Alaskan Native	1	0.1%
			Other	8	7.1%
Household Income					
Less than \$24,999	8	7.1%			
\$25,000-\$49,999	43	38.4%			
\$50,000-\$99,999	48	42.9%			
\$100,000-\$149,999	5	4.5%			
\$150,000 or more	6	5.4%			

RQ3: What motivates the digital audience to visit a comedy club?

The first aspect of the survey analyzed the potential threat of the digital alternative for Facebook fans of the Addison, Arlington, and Houston Improvs, with questions focusing on the

stand-up experience, with the questions originating from previous literature on the comedy club venue. This research built upon previous findings by including the digital platforms, television, and other media aspect (See Table 3.2)

TABLE 3.2
Stand-Up Experience Preferences (N=112)

Regularly used alternatives to live stand-up comedy	
TV	88.4%*
Internet	83.2%*
DVD	50.1%*
Other	7.1%*
Preferred stand-up comedy experience	
Live Venues	80.4%
TV	8.9%
Internet	5.4%
DVD	3.6%
Other	0.9%
Preferred venue for live stand-up comedy	
Small Arenas / Theaters	8.0%
Comedy Clubs	87.5%
Large Arenas	0.9%
Small Rooms in Bars	1.8%
Other	0.9%

* Respondents were allowed to select multiple answers

Through the survey results, this research confirms the appeal of the venue as a highlight to the stand-up comedy experience. As mentioned in previous literature, the venue is conducive to providing the physical audience “up close and personal” entertainment. The results collected echoed similar to characteristics explaining that the proximity to the comic, overall atmosphere, and the possibility of being a part of the show make up the best stand-up comedy experience. While a few comments did acknowledge the ease of DVD specials or Netflix, and one even

preferred the ability to multitask with house chores while listening to stand-up performances on spotify, the ability to see “impromptu jokes” outweighed the convenience. Furthermore, when the survey questioned the preference of a comedy club to other venues that also service comedic performances, the service aspect of the venue was also exposed. One respondent said, “The size of the venue and the ratio of people to staff [provide] a more intimate environment.”

RQ4: What digital messages influence audience attendance?

TABLE 3.3
Entertainment Selection Factors (N=111)

	Mean (5-pt Likert Scale)
Motivators	
Entertainment	4.44
Play/Fun	4.15
Venue	4.09
Social Interaction	3.76
Browsing/Variety-Seeking	3.69
Novelty	3.51
Habit	3.47
Information	3.35

The next questions in this survey regarded the factors influencing consumers when he or she decides what do to on any given night. Entertainment was the primary decision factor with nearly two thirds of the respondents selecting “strongly agree” on a 5-point Likert scale. Play/Fun, Browsing/Variety-Seeking, and Venue were the three most commonly selected values, following the general entertainment appeal (See Table 3.3).

When asked to elaborate on the possible selection factors, the concept of “entertainment” related to the individual entertainer and type of entertainment. This suggests that people look for a specific type of environment when they are selecting live entertainment. It should be noted that

the majority of responses referenced comedy club experiences, suggesting that this question requires clarification in the future when applied to analyzing the entertainment landscape. However, a common trend that can be identified from the responses is that social pressure is reoccurring, making friends and family significant influencers in the decision process. This does support previous literature in that the comedy club experience is associated with social interactions (Wilson, 2011; Thomas, 2014).

Given that this research focuses on the digital influence in the consumer decision process, the survey also asked questions reflecting the digital media experience. When asked if the respondents had attended an event he or she learned about on digital media, 67.6% of participants selected “definitely yes” and 19.8% chose “probably yes.” This means that nearly 90% of the respondents in the survey from Texas Improv Comedy Club’s Facebook fan page have attended events introduced to them through the digital platform. However, while general exposure to content on a digital platform compels the digital audience to attend events, most respondents reported that specific event pages or posts from fan pages influenced them over other factors (See Table 3.5).

TABLE 3.5
Audience Attendance and Digital Media Engagement

Factor	Mean (5-pt Likert Scale)
Specific event pages	3.87
Following fan pages	3.86
Online publications	3.50
My friends are attending	3.46
Sponsored advertisements	3.41
Random posts	3.36

RQ5: How and when does the digital audience use social media?

The content analysis verified that, like other Facebook fan pages, the Texas Improv Comedy Club has yet to identify a specific time to expose their audience to content. Furthermore, this research has already demonstrated that the quantity of posts does not increase the engagement from the digital audience. RQ5 looked to answer was how and when the digital audience uses the digital platform, the survey results provided such insight. Using the same factors included in general entertainment decisions; this research asked when individuals use social media for these specific needs.

TABLE 3.6
Audience Involvement with Digital Media (Social Media)

Factor	Inform	Entertain	Habit	Social	Novelty	Play	Browse
After waking up/Before Breakfast	42%	46%	29%	23%	5%	14%	15%
During Breakfast	32%	40%	25%	15%	7%	14%	17%
Mid to Late Afternoon	24%	41%	27%	25%	8%	14%	18%
During Lunch	27%	46%	27%	31%	11%	21%	19%
Early to Late Afternoon	23%	45%	25%	24%	7%	16%	18%
During Dinner	29%	46%	21%	20%	9%	13%	19%
After Dinner/ Before Bed	40%	54%	30%	35%	15%	19%	25%

Table 3.6 provides insight into the times and purposes that drive most people using social media. Given that the content analysis has identified that the Texas Improv Comedy Club's does not have a specific strategy for posting behavior, future strategy should consider when the digital audience is engaging on social media and for what purpose. The majority of the time, consumers use social media for entertainment purposes; however, they are most likely to socialize during lunch or after dinner. If the majority of the content that a Facebook page posts is informational, this research implies that the best times to post upcoming is in the morning or at night.

IMPLICATIONS

Digital media has added a new dimension to engaging with consumers for entertainment venues like the Texas Improv Comedy Clubs. Given that previous literature identified digital platforms like Netflix, Hulu, and YouTube, as rising challengers in the competitive landscape, physical venues are challenged with existing in a new medium. Through a dual-method research strategy, comprised of a content analysis of the Facebook pages and a survey taken by their digital audience members, this research has uncovered implications for consideration by the Texas Improv Comedy Clubs.

Practical

Regarding the current state of engagement with the digital audience, it does not appear that all opportunities are being taken advantage of by the Facebook profiles. One such example can be seen in Example 2.1, dated January 26, 2016, where the Houston Improv hosted an interactive contest on Facebook partnered with the film, *Fifty Shades of Black*. However a week later, the only person to respond commented again asking if he won.



Example 2.1: Missed Engagement Opportunity

The results comparing the Addison and Houston Facebook pages proved that quantity of posts does not increase the number of engagements with Facebook followers. Moreover, the fact that only 112 of the 100,000 collective Facebook Fans between the Addison, Arlington, and Houston Improv Comedy Clubs took a ten minute survey that guaranteed them four free tickets to a non-special comedy show of their choice, indicates that the posts that directly communicate with the audience are seemingly lost. This statistic means that this sample represented 0.1% of the Texas Improv Comedy Club fans on social media. For this reason, this research suggests a change in strategy for the venues operating on digital media.

First, the majority of engagements come from sponsored advertisements. While unsurprising given that impressions are purchased through this strategy, coupling with the number of posts providing similar information, it is equally understandable everyday posts receiving less attention. What is not explained, however, is why the Texas Improv Comedy

Clubs continue to over promote events through unsponsored replica means to such excess. One interesting finding from the content analysis dealt with the profile picture change. While usually not coupled with any buying strategy or descriptive text, this simple update tended to receive consistent engagements. This implies that this placement is influential in developing an engagement with the digital audience.

Theoretical

The foundations for this research were created using utilized by previous literature in the elaborations likelihood model (ELM) and the uses and gratifications theory (U&G). Similar to previous ELM literature, this research found that the majority of posts created by the Houston and Addison Improvs used a visual stimulant to support informational text (Rehman & Viash, 2013). Based off audience responses in the survey, this strategy does assist in the recall of either the upcoming comedian's material or previous experiences at comedy clubs, which in turn, helps in persuading their purchase behavior. Furthermore, based off the influence of the venue in the comedy club experience, future posts disclosing information about the venue may persuade consumers to purchase tickets for upcoming shows.

The coding strategy for the content analysis was designed based off previous literature designed for evaluating television through uses and gratifications theory (Rubin, 1983). The current digital landscape for the Texas Improv Comedy Clubs heavily favors information gratifiers, which might imply a common misunderstanding of the digital medium. As previous literature implies the necessity for dialogue and two-way communication, this research implies the need for comedy clubs digital presence to include more interactivity and involvement.

The survey also uncovered important social gratifications to the comedy club experience. Not only do patrons enjoy meeting or interacting with the traveling comedians, but they typically are influenced by friends and family. Furthermore, one respondent recognized that hearing a comedian perform live offers the opportunity to get a babysitter and feel like an adult; specifically, the content was more appropriate in the live venue as compared to at home where kids could overhear. These responses suggest an escapism quality of the live comedy experience that is not offered by digital competitors. Incorporating this characteristic in social media marketing campaigns could change the overall tone of upcoming shows and influence the digital audience to purchase tickets.

Leadership

Given that the majority of posts presented information about upcoming shows, one surprising statistic uncovered by the content analysis found that only 34% of posts included a purchase link for individuals to buy tickets. While few included a phone number as an alternative or suggested visiting the website, without the direct URL this either adds unnecessary steps in the purchasing process or completely neglects the digital nature of the medium.

Partnered with the results from the survey, virtual audience insight enhances this digital media strategy. The digital audience identified factors like the venue, meeting the comics after the show, and the food as significant to their comedy club experience. However, these characteristics are less transferable with the current strategy. Granted, responses indicated the comedian as significant to the decision process, but this is only one part of the experience. Moving forward, Traynor might consider incorporating photos of the comics interacting with the fans outside of the club (interactivity), menu updates (information), or pictures of the venues

(disclosure) to possibly alter the social media experience to motivate the digital audience to visit a comedy club over alternative options.

Finally, the survey uncovered the audience involvement with digital media. By knowing when the virtual audience uses digital media for specific purposes, the Texas Improv Comedy Clubs can identify the most important times to post content, so as to not allow important upcoming events to be lost on the digital platform. Given the current information driven strategy, the results suggest that the best times to reach the virtual audience for this purpose are early in the morning before breakfast or late at night after dinner. If engaging in an interactive survey or poll, where the company is searching for feedback, this research suggests that the virtual audience is most social during lunch or last at night. Knowing that the repeated exposure strategy implemented by the Houston Improv Comedy Club was less effective than fewer exposures, these findings suggest the need for the Texas Improv Comedy Clubs to reach their audience during times that are effective.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Erdogmus and Tatar (2015) highlighted that digital commerce is influenced by the engagement through social media, because the medium creates a community of likeminded individuals engaging with the brand and generating long lasting value through two-way communication (p.189). In their study they proposed a model based on current research to be utilized for impacting consumer responses and overall engagement. Moving forward, this research model might provide the blueprint for the Texas Improv Comedy Clubs in modifying social media engagement to influence purchase intention.

The scope of this research poses a possible limitation. Considering the sample size reflected only patrons of comedy clubs, future research should target digital audiences of competing entertainment venues, such as performance halls, stadiums, and movie theaters. Having a well-rounded understanding of the appeal of these competitors will only allow the Texas Improv Comedy Clubs to best position their product in the digital market. Furthermore, this would allow the Texas Improv Comedy Clubs to identify and interact with potential consumers who would engage in digital media. The current research was limited to only brand loyal respondents as these were individuals who actively choose to interact with the Texas Improv Comedy Clubs on Facebook.

Finally, the content analysis of this research was created based off characteristics of previous social media literature on blog post content. Future studies should also look to identify market leaders in digital engagement and evaluate their content comparatively. As digital media literature expands, these characteristics should be expanded upon and future research should consider such modifications.

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Appendix 1

Codesheet

IMPROV SOCIAL MEDIA POSTS

Venue:	Date Posted:
<p>1. Type of Media</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">a) Textb) Videoc) Photod) Text and Photoe) Text and Video	
<p>2. Hyperlink to website/purchase option</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">a) Yesb) No	
<p>3. Post Content</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">a) Disclosureb) Informationc) Interactivity/Involvemente) Retweet/Repost	
<p>4. Number of Engagements</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">a) likesb) commentsc) shares	

5. Engagement Opportunity

a) Did Improv Respond?

1. Yes
2. No

b) Type of Response

1. Disclosure
2. Information
3. Interactivity
4. Involvement

Please list any comments (quality/type of responses from Improv/profile pic changes/possible sponsored advertisement)

Disclosure: Information about organization, information about history, information about mission, link to general website, logo

Information dissemination: News links to external media coverage, information in visual forms, announcements, links to press releases, campaign summaries

Interactivity / Involvement: polls, questions, live video streams, contact information, links, opportunities for feedback, games/quizzes

Retweet / Repost: Original content not created by the Improv