Commodity Flow Analysis

CBS’ Big Brother is a reality game show where contestants are followed around 24 hours a day by cameras and microphones, competing for the $500,000 grand prize (Imbd.com). Each week, the houseguests vote off a player that is on the eviction block. The game is full of competitions that reward the winning houseguests with power over the other houseguests. Big Brother has been airing every summer since 2000, and currently has 18 seasons. Each season, CBS adds new twists to the game. For example, this season CBS brought back America’s favorite houseguests from past seasons into the game, which made the past houseguests a target to the new houseguests. This also brings fanatics of the show (like myself) to enjoy the game even more because their favorite houseguest is back for another season. Also, this season Big Brother added a new twist called “Battle Back,” which gave the first five evicted houseguests a chance to reenter the house for another shot at winning the grand prize of $500,000. According to The Internet Movie Database, CBS’ Big Brother is the most popular game-show television series (Imdb.com). Because Big Brother is so popular in America and around the world, advertisers willingly pay to have houseguests use, wear, and discuss their products.

To watch season 18 episode 10 of Big Brother, I streamed it on the CBS website. There were around 5 sets of commercials periodically during the show, each lasting about 4 minutes. Some commercials, such as Wal-Mart and Dell, were related to the back to school season that is approaching. Other commercials were advertising the products that were seen in the background of the show. For example, a houseguest was shown applying CoverGirl’s Lash Blast mascara in the mirror while talking about the game to another houseguest. Following the scene, a CoverGirl commercial was played on the stream, advertising the same mascara the houseguest was using. There was also an Advil Liquid Gels in the background of a scene followed by an Advil commercial. Also, another houseguest was shown looking through her Victoria’s Secret makeup bag and using her Victoria’s Secret perfume. During the stream, Victoria’s Secret showed 2 commercials advertising their sales and new bras. CBS is the channel that airs the famous Annual Victoria’s Secret Fashion Show. Also, CBS has behind the scene footage of the fashion show, interviews with the models, and photos of the models on their website. CBS is major distributor and advertiser of Victoria’s Secret news and content.

CBS also heavily advertises their own original series and merchandise through commercials and product placement. For example, during the stream, there were 6 commercials relating to CBS content. CBS advertised their new original series *Kevin Can Wait* by showing a commercial and displaying a banner at the bottom of the screen twice during the stream of the show. There was also a commercial advertising the CBS app and Big Brother Live Feeds. Big Brother Live Feeds is a monthly subscription where fans can spy on the houseguests 24/7. Throughout the episode, the houseguests were drinking from the Big Brother water bottles and wearing Big Brother robes. Both of these items can be purchased on the CBS website along with props from competitions seen throughout the show.

Lastly, the sponsor of this episode was Outback Steakhouse. The competition and plot of this episode were centered on Outback Steakhouse’s new menu. The competition required the houseguests to memorize a sequence of ingredients. If the houseguest answered correctly the question about the sequence, they advanced to the next round. The winner of the competition would walk away with the Power of Veto and a four-coursed dinner, courtesy of Outback Steakhouse. During the dinner, the houseguests had a conversation about how much they loved the food and Outback Steakhouse. For example, Paulie mentioned, “before I left home, I really wanted to go to Outback Steakhouse.”

I think there is a strong relationship between the promotional messages and the content of this episode. Majority of the products shown in the episode also had a commercial in the stream. For example, I noticed if a product was not sponsored, the label was turned away from the camera or removed. The houseguests also wear clothing without brand logos. This relationship influences the products the houseguests use, the discussions being made between houseguests, and the overall plot of the episode.

Sources

"Big Brother." *The Internet Movie Database.* IMDb.com, Inc, n.d. Web. 29 July 2016.

"Big Brother Video - Episode 10 - CBS.com." *CBS*. N.p., n.d. Web. 29 July 2016.

Mcallister, Matthew P., and J. Matt Giglio. "The Commodity Flow of U.S. Children's Television." *Critical Studies in Media Communication* 22.1 (2005): 110-25. Web.

"Most Popular Game-Show TV Series." *The Internet Movie Database.* IMDb.com, Inc, n.d. Web. 29 July 2016.  
"Victoria's Secret Fashion Show - CBS.com." *CBS*. N.p., n.d. Web. 30 July 2016.