


Shifting Rhetorical Norms and Electronic Eloquence: TED Talks as Formal Presentations

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Abstract

Advances in digital media have made an impact on traditional rhetorical culture, thus shifting expectations and norms associated with orality and public presentation. Technology, entertainment, and design (TED) talks represent a new genre of presentation characteristic of Jamieson's notion of electronic eloquence in that presenters weave together an engaging narrative complete with a strong visual presence. This study applies Bandura's social cognitive learning theory to explore how students make sense of TED talks. Students responded to two questionnaires in two different classes: a basic public speaking course and a technical communication course. The results suggest that students learn vicariously through viewing mediated presentations, thus shaping their view of public speaking as a coproduced, networked, and engaging narrative. The authors offer recommendations for communication practitioners related to electronic eloquence and the rhetorical tradition.

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Current pedagogies have the opportunity to profit from new technologies. Instructors are teaching a new generation of students—a generation raised on social media such as Instagram, Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube (McClung & Johnson, 2010; Verna, 2008). One specific type of video technology has the potential to inform the way we teach public presentations—technology, entertainment, and design (TED) talks. Despite the growing popularity and wide presence of TED talks on social media, we know little about how students use, respond to, or perceive those talks. Although we know, anecdotally, that students watch them, little is known about the potential pedagogical impacts of TED talks on students' perceptions of public speaking events.

In particular, rhetorical norms associated with public presentations are shifting. Our (almost constant) exposure to mediated communication and social networking has resulted in changing assumptions about information design and delivery, especially with respect to presentations. Mediated trends suggest that we prefer information that is entertaining and aesthetically packaged. In fact, TED talks are viewed 1.5 million times a day (ted.com). The degree of public engagement with TED talks implies that people are drawn to dynamic presenters who can weave an engaging story line complete with strong visual integration. In other words, electronic eloquence (Jamieson, 1998) draws the public to view these presentations. But how much are our students gleaned from watching these mediated presentations? And what meanings do students associate with public speaking if they are constantly engaging with these mediated presentations? How can or should our pedagogy incorporate electronic eloquence in the teaching of public speaking and professional presentation? We posit that students' exposure to mediated presentations results in their developing expectations about public presentations that, in turn, can affect teaching and learning. Thus, this study explores how students make sense of TED talks as formal public presentations. We applied social cognitive learning theory (Bandura, 1977, 1986) to a qualitative content analysis of students' responses in two questionnaires.

In the following sections, we first provide background information on presentation pedagogy and the digital age. Next, we highlight our theoretical and methodological commitments. Finally, we provide the results and implications of our research and offer recommendations for communication practitioners.

Electronic Eloquence

Advances in digital media have affected traditional rhetorical culture, thus shifting expectations and norms associated with orality and public presentation. As Simons (1999) stated, “the proliferation of computers, televisions, video games, and movies . . . is profoundly affecting people’s perceptions of what a presentation ought to be” (p. 6). In particular, Jamieson (1998) explained a new form of eloquence characterized by narrative, self-disclosure, and visual modes of persuasion—*electronic eloquence*, in which the eloquent speaker engages the audience and speaks comfortably—in contrast to the logic and structure, ethos, and audience expectations that the old form of eloquence privileges (e.g., Frobish, 2000). Thus, an eloquent message is “defined by the clarity of the story, the passion with which it is told, and its relevance to the audience” (Endicott, 1999, p. 28). It emphasizes creating a personal connection with the audience and speaking with an approachable demeanor that is more interpersonal in nature (e.g., Schatz, 1997).

An engaging story is made more powerful by incorporating purposeful, multimedia images in addition to verbally presenting information. Moreover, the interplay between verbal and visual elements “highlights the interrelationship of invention and organization in contemporary public discourse” such that “speakers use graphic design to create previews, menus, running heads, color coding, and graphic guides that replace verbal signposting” (Cyphert, 2007, p. 174). Visuals become more than just an aid; instead, they are important elements in facilitating ethos and developing a relationship with the audience. Consequently, those responsible for teaching students how to communicate effectively must attend to these shifting rhetorical norms that characterize communication in the mediated public sphere.

Rethinking Presentation Pedagogy

If public speaking and presentation texts in some ways drive course curricula or formal presentation assignments, then the content of such texts and

guidebooks can illuminate the current norms and values of many professional and technical communication programs. A cursory review of some of the more popular texts illustrates that students are taught various presentation genres with specific attention to the linear processes of generating and supporting ideas, outlining, preparing visual aids, and rehearsing.

For example, students are taught about adapting a message to the audience, following an appropriate organizational structure, using engaging language, adhering to proper vocal and physical delivery, and using notes or outlines to help them deliver the prepared speech (e.g., Griffin, 2009; Lucas, 2009; Zarefsky, 2011). While the instruction relates to the canons of rhetoric—*invention, arrangement, style, memory, and delivery*—Sproule (1997) argued that most of the advice in textbooks dates from the 1920s, when the focus shifted from an oratorical framework to an instruction-based model. As a result, the generic instruction characterizing presentation pedagogy typically privileges a genre approach designed to equip students with a basic level of knowledge regarding public presentations. In other words, the approach emphasizes prescriptive advice about form, and students are encouraged to follow a linear process to developing a speech from brainstorming to outlining to delivering. Even with the advances in visual technology (e.g., PowerPoint), we see little evidence that presentation pedagogy has shifted to include detailed discussion on how computer-generated visuals can enhance the presentation experience. In short, rather than responding to advances in new technologies and attempting to reexamine the rhetorical tradition, speech pedagogy remains grounded in traditional ideas.

Scholars, such as Porter (2009), have questioned the basic ways in which we engage the canons of rhetoric and suggested that with the changing of technology and focus, this preservation of contemporary knowledge is problematic. For example, Porter argued that delivery needs to be retheorized, arguing that “the canon of delivery is the most powerful, now more than ever in the digital age” (p. 208). What he was mostly concerned with was using the traditional canons, delivery in particular, to fully understand the rhetorical situation of the digital age. Because of the digital component, delivery (i.e., digital delivery) of videos (e.g., games, videos, podcasts) is much more intricate. For example, the texts, when online (assuming URL links are not broken), are always available; delivery, in this sense, is constant because the videos can always be streamed, paused, and played again. In this sense, the concept of digital distribution is inherent because the videos are readily available to share. Servers that house Web sites such as those on tedtalks.com support sharing (digital distribution) via copying

links to material into e-mails, tweets, or Facebook posts, thus encouraging delivery of not only the podcast but also a more enhanced, engaging presentation than those that characterize the speaker-centered Aristotelian model. In other words, speakers must become even more dynamic and engaging because the Internet encourages fast surfing, clicking on and off consumed images, and the ability to deliver “liked” images to friends, making delivery a theoretical conception that includes delivery of the speaker and delivery of mediated images.

Similarly, Welch (1999) posited that we should reconceive delivery as medium. She claimed that doing so takes into account the connection to the audience and that delivery is coproduced with audiences (by liking, sharing, etc.). Prior et al. (2007) built on this notion, claiming that delivery, as medium, should be delivery as mediation because mediated activity accounts for technical mediation or digital delivery and sharing. The authors contended that “mediation and distribution are also phenomena that operate at each moment in the process, as the ‘text’ is always being mediated and distributed in some fashion, actually in multiple ways” (p. 5), meaning that the person who is watching the podcast has a more intelligent moment of interaction that happens on multiple levels, which changes the person’s perception of the delivered moment. For example, the viewing of podcasts can occur on smartphones, computer screens, or television screens in airports, cars, or even at work. All of these contextual elements influence the delivery that must be conceptualized with new understanding.

Also, the canons should be reconceptualized to include the idea of digital delivery (via screen not software). A similar case to that made for the persuasive nature of visual rhetoric can be applied in this framework—the idea of visual identification is best suited for our study. Kenney (2002) explained that “identification occurs via a common [visual] language, shared assumptions, stereotypes and universal appeals. . . . Visual identification often is used to separate ‘us’ from ‘them’” (p. 67). In other words, the visual presentation or delivery requires a new way of conceptualizing audience analysis, for example, by considering issues such as what new problems are encountered in digital spaces (e.g., time, ability to pause, replay); what, if any, jargon is appropriate and necessary (e.g., podcast vs. streaming); or what considerations need to be made when the audience expands and the assumed purpose is to engage the masses.

In addition to responding to new advances in research, speech pedagogy should embrace advances in technology and “be sensitive to culture and media” (Sproule, 2002, p. 2). Arguably, we are teaching a new generation

of students who have been exposed to and interacted with technology from a very young age and continue to do so via computers, tablets, smartphones, and so on. (McClung & Johnson, 2010; Verna, 2008).

Social Learning Through TED Talks

Podcasts—in particular, TED talks—have great potential for enhancing presentation pedagogy, both through relaying instructional material and through sharing exemplar presentations with students. TED talks are a form of multimedia presentation delivered by people who are not professional speakers; rather, they are people who have innovative ideas related to TED who seek to communicate their ideas to potential collaborators or investors. TED-talk speakers adhere to a strict time limit, incorporate presentation media throughout the talk, and relay the information from memory—no notes allowed. From an academic perspective, TED talks do not generally conform to the traditional criteria for success. Often, speakers' delivery is not polished, yet speakers are engaging and effective because they speak with enthusiasm and passion for their topic. They typically incorporate a narrative approach designed to make information accessible for “public consumption,” and they connect with the audience, often on an emotional level.

The structure of a TED talk typically includes “an opening of direct address, a narrative of personal stake, a research summary, a précis of potential applications, a revelation to drive it home, and an ending that says, go forth and help humanity” (Heller, 2012, p. 74). TED talks also represent electronic eloquence (Jamieson, 1998) through their multimedia storytelling approach. But how might students engage with TED talks and use them to inform their own understandings of professional presentations? In other words, how might an appreciation of electronic eloquence influence students' expectations about orality? Bandura's (1977, 1986) social cognitive learning theory provides a useful framework for understanding students' engagement with podcasts in general and TED talks in particular.

Social learning theory explains how individuals can learn and acquire knowledge through observing and modeling the behavior of others. Bandura advanced a four-step process consisting of attention, retention, reproduction, and motivation as the framework for vicarious learning. First, an individual must perceive and analyze what they see; thus, attention involves both perception and cognition such that observers' expectations affect what they attend to and how they interpret what they see and hear. As Bandura (1986) stated, “attention involves self-directed exploration of the environment and construction of meaningful perceptions from ongoing modeled

events. People will pay attention to activities that they find personally relevant or interesting” (p. 53). Second, the knowledge gained from observed behavior must be retained to serve as a guide for future action. Retention is about relating new information with what is already known through words, labels, or imagery that can be easily recalled. Knowledge gained through observational learning will be more easily retained if it is perceived as valuable or useful (Bandura, 1977). Third, individuals must move from observation to action through reproducing the observed behavior. Motivational processes affect the likelihood of such reproduction of observed behavior; that is, incentive to perform is based on the anticipated positive consequences.

Attention to and retention of exemplar behavior is most relevant to our study. We were interested in students’ perceptions of TED talks and in how students attend to and make sense of (retain) information learned from these exemplar presentations. Students can acquire knowledge and new patterns of behavior by observing others’ performance and through modeling behavior that they see as producing positive consequences. Further, vicarious learning is increasingly important in today’s heavily mediated environment:

The rapid pace of informational, social, and technological change is placing a premium on personal efficacy for self-development and self-renewal. . . . In the past, students’ educational development was largely determined by the schools to which they were assigned. Nowadays, the Internet provides vast opportunities for students to control their own learning. (Bandura, 2001, p. 11)

So if TED talks and electronic eloquence is what students are seeing and hearing, how are they making sense of these exemplars?

As a mediated form of communication representing electronic eloquence, TED talks have the potential to affect our teaching and students’ vicarious learning of presentation principles. Despite this potential, we could find no empirical research that investigated TED talks within the context of communication pedagogy, and we became curious about how students might view TED talks and make sense of them as public presentations. Thus, we advance the following research questions:

Research Question 1: How do students describe TED talks, both before and after viewing, in terms of the rhetorical situation?

Research Question 2: What aspects of TED talks do students attend to and retain?

Method

To learn about students' knowledge and understanding of TED talks, informative podcasts that are, arguably, widely disseminated among college students (e.g., Laurillard, 2007), we employed qualitative data gathering and analysis. The institutional review board provided approval for this project. To gain a more complete understanding, we drew our sample from students enrolled in two pedagogically disparate though presentation-based courses: a technical communication course and two sections of the basic public speaking course. In total, 53 students were enrolled in the technical communication course and 48 students were enrolled in the two sections of the basic course.

We distributed two questionnaires in each course during the same weeks of the semester and after the same basic foundations of the rhetorical situation were covered in order to ensure consistency in introductory information. Our data set consisted of 148 total questionnaires—90 responses to the first questionnaire and 58 responses to the second questionnaire. We distributed the first questionnaire during class, resulting in a higher response rate. Viewing the TED talk and completing the second questionnaire was an optional assignment, resulting in a decrease in responses. Results from both questionnaires helped us answer our research questions. First, we were interested in learning about students' knowledge and viewing of TED talks. We administered the first questionnaire (see Appendix A) to assess students' knowledge of these presentations and to help us answer our first research question. Ninety students completed the first questionnaire designed to tap into their baseline knowledge about TED talks. Of these participants, 56% ($n = 50$) were enrolled in the technical communication course and 44% ($n = 40$) were enrolled in the basic public speaking course. The majority of participants ($n = 52$) were engineering majors, with communication majors constituting the second largest group ($n = 14$).

Next, we asked students to select and watch one of three possible talks. Then we administered a second questionnaire (see Appendix B) designed to illicit information about students' views on the talks as representing a formal speaking event and specific elements of the speaker's communication skills. Fifty-eight students completed the second questionnaire. Of these participants, 33% ($n = 19$) were enrolled in the technical communication course and 67% ($n = 39$) were enrolled in the basic public speaking course. The largest group of participants was engineering majors ($n = 20$) with communication majors constituting the second largest group ($n = 12$).

We selected the following TED talks: *Massimo Banzi: How Arduino Is Open Sourcing Imagination* (Banzi, 2012), *Jeff Hancock: The Future of*

Lying (Hancock, 2012), and *Amos Winter: The Cheap All Terrain Wheelchair* (Winter (2012)). We allowed students to select from among three videos because “people will pay more attention to modeled activities if they find them to be personally relevant and interesting” (Bandura, 1986, pp. 53–54). We chose the three videos from the top videos related to technology during the month of October in 2012 (TED staff, 2012). During this time, each video had between 400,000 and 500,000 views. Each video engaged technology (broadly, the topic of our study) in nuanced ways through similar rhetorical strategies (e.g., each video started with a similar narrative hook).

We unitized the data based on identifiable units of meaning that were informed by our two research questions (Tracy, 2013). Appropriately, identifiable units were different according to each respective research question. For example, when students used specific language that mirrored their knowledge of the rhetorical situation, we used that data for analyzing our first research question. Furthermore, each instructor’s teaching notes became important for making sense of student’s responses. In other words, how each instructor taught or defined rhetorical elements helped in aligning with the appropriate research question.

To analyze the data, we used an inductive qualitative content analysis. In our first phase of data analysis, we each read through every response from both questionnaires to conceptualize the data by noting key words and phrases (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). That is, we individually generated categories using *in vivo* codes—labels that were derived directly from participant language (Tracy, 2013). In our second phase of data analysis, we lumped students’ responses into similar codes using the constant comparison method (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Tracy, 2013). This second-level coding was modified as a regular part of the qualitative research process in order to obtain the best descriptors. Specifically, we drew comparisons between the key words and phrases to develop broad, encompassing categories and more closely examined the *in vivo* codes to identify relationships between groupings. In our third phase, we went back to the data to look for evidence to support or refute the relationships between categories in order to ensure integrity of analysis. Both of us agreed on categories developed from a collaboration of the first-level coding structure. Throughout each phase of analysis, we engaged in perception checking and verification (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) by going back to the data and the participants’ own words. In rare instances of disagreement, we discussed the response until we agreed on the appropriate category.

Results

Our purpose was to explore how students make sense of TED talks as public presentations. Two key findings emerged from our data analysis. First, students attempted to reconcile their perceptions of a formal speaking event through identifying tensions between traditional conceptions of audience, speaker, and context. Second, students' ability to recall presentation content was enhanced due to speakers' engaging the audience by incorporating effective visual aids, fostering personal connections, and using dynamic delivery.

Reconciling Formality: Audience, Speaker, and Context

Research Question 1 examined how students describe TED talks, both before and after viewing, in terms of the rhetorical situation. The results of our analysis suggest that the way students made sense of TED talks both before and after viewing the selected videos involved a process of reconciling formality. About half of the participants characterized TED talks as formal speaking events whereas the remaining participants claimed that these talks are informal or that they share some aspects of both formality and informality (i.e., semiformal). Open coding of students' responses regarding the formality of TED talks showed that aspects of the rhetorical situation—audience, speaker, and context—affected their views. That is, students' descriptions both before and after viewing were not distinct in any patterned way. Rather, they were characterized by a struggle to reconcile formality with regard to the presence and purpose of the audience, the speaker's style, and presentation context. For example, one student commented, "I think the TED talks are leaning away from formal speaking events but still possess some essence of what a formal speaking event provides." In all, three specific themes emerged: (a) passive versus active audiences, (b) formal versus casual speaker presence, and (c) immediate versus mediated context. We examine these three themes with regard to the formal, informal, and semiformal tensions that these students identified within TED talks.

Passive versus active audiences. Students acknowledged formality regarding the speaker–audience relationship in terms of the audience's passively listening to be informed instead of actively engaging in the speaking event. The mere presence of the audience resulted in students viewing the TED

talk as a formal speaking event; people need to be present to receive the speaker's message, as this comment suggests:

Public speaking is a process of speaking to a group of people in a thoughtful manner. The speaker has a reason for addressing the audience, to persuade, inform, entertain, make a difference, or change in some way. [TED talks] are public speeches because there is a speaker and an audience.

Similarly, a student commented that the TED talks are "formal speaking events because there is one speaker and an audience who sits there and listens. . . . There is no interaction or discussion." This comment invokes the importance of audience and yet carefully points out that formal presentations are one-way communication in that audience participation is limited to listening. Another student noted, "I think that wherever there is an audience to listen to a speaker makes it formal." In essence, the first characteristic to acknowledging the formality of a TED talk was the presence of the audience listening (without interaction) in a formal setting: "They have formal seating, filming, lighting," and "they are informative speeches delivered in a formal venue."

In addition, students stated that a TED talk was a formal event because the audience was learning something. That is, if the speaker was informing and the audience was learning new or challenging information, then the event was deemed formal. For example, "[TED talks represent formal speaking events because] people learn something new." In other words, students suggested that the speaker must be disseminating new knowledge to the audience in order for the event to be considered formal. Further illustrating students' perception that the purpose of a formal speaking event is to convey new information, other comments suggest that in order to give a formal presentation, the speaker needs to be both informed and prepared: "[TED talks represent formal speaking events] because they are prepared presentations; preparation is required," and "[speakers] are talking about their experiences, informing people, and the topic is important to them." In all, the presence of audience members who listen passively to a speaker in order to learn new information seemed to contextualize for students the formality of a speaking event. While the presence of an audience certainly represented formality to students, the persona of the speaker also contributed to their conceptions of the TED talk as a formal event.

Formal versus casual speaker presence. The second way these students struggled to reconcile formality was related to the speaker's presence as either

formal or casual. In both courses, students were instructed that effective speeches are audience centered; however, working in tandem with audience to further contextualize the event is the effect that the speaker's persona has on audience engagement. In other words, the delivery style of the speaker dictated the tone and students' subsequent perceptions of informality. Students who did not characterize TED talks as representing formal speaking events pointed to the speaker's efforts to engage and relate to the audience as the primary reason.

That is, the speaker's use of humor and other audience engagement techniques led students to view the talks as more informal: "I think they are pretty laid back and casual. This is because the speaker is moving around, jokes are being made, and the audience is engaged." Students cited the casual, informal atmosphere surrounding the talks as an indication that they do not represent a formal presentation: "It is a more informal way of presenting," and "it's more relaxed." Some students tried to reconcile this new type of presentation with what they already knew about public speaking, as this comment illustrates:

Based off of the significance of the topic that the speaker is presenting and the setting of the event, I definitely feel it is formal. The speaker is on stage, well dressed, and discussing pertinent information to society that is being received readily and respectfully. There does seem to be a slightly lighter side to the talk as the presenter makes jokes and applications that maybe aren't what I would have expected in a formal event, but I feel it enhances the speech.

It seems, then, that speakers' efforts to engage, rather than simply inform, a passive audience contributed to students' viewing the talks as less formal.

Immediate versus mediated contexts. The third way that students reconciled formality was with regard to the tension between the context and location of the audience in relation to that of the speaker. In other words, TED talks are presented in two specific formats: in the immediate setting (in person) and online through electronic viewing (mediated). Due to the wide dissemination of the events via social media, the context is an important factor for students in determining the formality of the event. In fact, the majority of students described the audience as the general public, which presents an interesting paradox when considered in accordance with their description of the talks as formal or informal. That is, while half of the students characterized the talks as a type of formal presentation, they also viewed the audience as the general public, arguably, the diverse, mediated audience that other students cited as the primary reason for characterizing the talks as informal.

TED presenters try to appeal to a broad audience, and their presentations were described by students as talks delivered to an audience of “anyone interested in the topics” because the presentations can be accessed by anyone anywhere. The fact that the audience is “anyone” affects students’ views on the formality of the presentation. Specifically, as one student commented, TED talks are not representative of formal presentations because “they [speakers] try to communicate to as much diversity of audience as they can.” Despite recognizing that each talk had one speaker and an audience, students perceived TED talks as less formal because the speakers adapt their message to a lay (both present and mediated) audience: “They are brief, less technical, and more interesting,” and “they are speeches presented in a formal venue but to a lay audience.” Thus, to these students, the fact that the speakers presented information to a broad audience seemed to render the speech informal.

The dissemination on the Internet broadens the audience from just the in-person audience (typically, invited attendees such as investors, researchers, or potential collaborators) to a larger, virtual audience (i.e., general public). Students’ comments specifically acknowledged the additional audience that is “present” via the mediated nature of the talks:

The speaker is addressing a specific audience within the auditorium and also a much broader audience who views the speech through the Internet.

The speaker is speaking to an audience whether they are there [in person] or watching it online; the audience still responds to how the speaker presents the information, regardless of if they are present or not.

Such comments further illustrate the tension between linking formality with specified learning and informality with engaged experience.

In short, this analysis suggests that students grappled with traditional conceptions of public address and performance within the context of this new form of presentation—the TED talk. As a result, students appeared to recognize a difference between the rhetorical situation as traditionally articulated and a more rearticulated version that enables presentation sharing via the Internet. More important, the students identified both a relationship and tension between the audience, speaker, and context in connection to formality: “Yes I believe [TED talks] are semi-formal. [The speaker] was very well practiced and did not take questions. His dress was nice, but not a suit and tie,” and “I think TED talks are more semiformal because it is a scheduled speaking event which makes it more formal, but it can become

semiformal because the speaking topics and speakers can be more casual in their speech.” Overall, students believed that TED talks represented semiformal speaking events, and they pointed to aspects of the rhetorical situation in order to describe the talks as informative presentations given by experts to a broad audience in a forum for sharing ideas. This general description also illustrates how students attempted to reconcile this new type of presentation with what they already know about public speaking. More specifically, speakers’ efforts to engage a diverse (i.e., mediated) audience resulted in students’ perceptions of a level of informality that distinguishes these talks from more traditional public address.

Attention and Retention: Visual Aids, Personal Connections, and Dynamic Delivery

Research question 2 examined what aspects of TED talks students attend to and retain. Students recalled specific aspects of the content that were memorable due to the speakers’ engaging use of (a) visual aids, (b) personal connections, and (c) dynamic delivery.

Visual aids. Students commented that visual aids were important in helping them remember the specific points of the speech:

The parts of the talk that stood out most . . . were the design and innovation of the visual aids and how well they paired with his speaking points.

The visuals he used, especially his videos, helped me understand his product better . . . why he designed it . . . and how it works. . . . The photos and videos . . . helped me remember his product.

Visual aids helped to engage the audience because they showed the technology in order to facilitate understanding or support the speaker’s points. As one student commented, “He used a lot of pictures and videos that helped to show the end result of the cheap and effective wheelchair and this supported his key points.” The simplicity of the slides and the fact that they contained mostly pictures provided the visual context necessary to ignite excitement for the topic, as this comment demonstrates:

The visuals were very effective because they were able to portray the creativity and the actual projects that he was trying to describe. Actually seeing the projects in action shows the capabilities of the arduino and ignites creativity in the audience more than just explaining it in words.

Students also explicitly pointed to the importance of visuals for helping them to retain information: “The visuals made the speaker’s message clearer, increased the interest of the speaker’s information, enhanced the speaker’s credibility, and made the speaker’s message easier to retain.” All of these comments show how the speakers incorporated visuals to create an engaging story that facilitated students’ ability to recall specific aspects of the content.

Personal connections. We surmise that it was precisely the electronic eloquence of the presentation that contributed to students’ ability to recall such detailed aspects of the content. In creating an engaging story, the speaker goes beyond incorporating the traditional structure of effective redundancy or repetition in terms of organization (preview, stating main points, and conclusion); rather, the speaker incorporates examples and illustrations, poses questions, and uses humor in order to make a personal connection and hold the audience’s attention. One student noted that “he drew me in and made [me relate to] the presentation by giving examples that were relevant to the audience and [that drew] people in. He showed how it was free to create whatever you wanted.” Additionally, speakers engaged the audience through inviting participation by asking questions: “The speaker engaged the audience by taking various polls. By directly asking the audience questions he brings them into his topic and makes them pay attention to what he is saying.” Another student noticed that “he engaged the audience by asking them questions like ‘did anybody lie today?’ He also gave an example of a truth and a lie and asked the audience to detect which was a lie.”

Using humor and telling jokes were also cited as effective techniques that served to entertain audiences, thus fostering personal connections that affected their attention: “He drew the audience in really well. He started out with a joke to make the audience laugh. By laughing, as the audience, we wanted to continue to listen.” He was humorous at various points and this made him very relatable.

Students’ description of humor as both an important strategy for creating personal connections and yet an indicator of a level of informality is illuminating with respect to their vicarious learning. In other words, students’ traditional assumptions of what a public speaking moment should be are in tension with the engaging and entertaining techniques that facilitate retention of information. This tension suggests that instructors must consider ways of redefining public speaking moments in order to make the connection between traditional rhetorical principles and mediated events.

Dynamic delivery. Students also attended to the speaker's dynamic delivery in terms of the effect it had on them. Specific comments about delivery point to a style that is open and engaging, one in which the speaker shared enthusiasm and passion for the topic that both made audiences want to listen and helped them to retain the content:

Listening to the speaker's delivery, I could tell he was very enthusiastic about the subject matter. . . . These emotive inflections seem to stir up excitement to the speaker's topic.

The thing that stood out most was Massimo's enthusiasm and examples that he used to give himself breaks.

He seemed confident in his discussion and his subject, he didn't look nervous at all he just seemed to be telling a story, very comfortable.

Such comments point to conceptions of effective delivery that have less to do with specific aspects of a speaker's vocal tone and body language than with the speaker's ability to tell a story with enthusiasm. That is, speakers who exhibit a dynamic, engaging style share their passion with the audience, thus igniting shared interest and excitement:

The speaker was genuine and passionate about the topic and shared his opinions in his own way. He was not trying to hide his personality and put on a professional face as much as he was trying to meet the audience's needs and make them interested and happy.

In short, the speaker's engaging, narrative style facilitated students' ability to recall detailed aspects of the presentations. Moreover, although students commented on and retained different information about delivery, regardless of their specific delivery focus, they seemed to be changing their expectations of delivery with regard to technology, arguably because of their exposure to electronic media. This shift in students' expectations can be explained by social cognitive theory, which would suggest that such mirroring of expectations regarding what we see and what we expect is, to some degree, influenced by what we have learned through interaction with digital media.

In summary, our results indicated that students' expectations about public speaking, perhaps partially derived from mediated social learning, affected their perceptions of TED talks and how they interpreted these electronic presentations. A shift in students' perceptions of TED talks

before and after viewing also lends credence to some level of vicarious learning, as does students' recognition of the importance of an engaging and dynamic delivery to effective presentation.

Discussion and Implications

Our unique position as communication instructors, with experience both in teaching the basic course and in providing integrated communication instruction in a technical communication course, led us to become curious about how we might reimagine communication pedagogy in the electronic age. As a first step, we explored how students made sense of one specific mediated public presentation, the TED talk. Our analysis showed that students learned vicariously through viewing TED talks and other mediated presentations and that this experience shaped their views of public presentations. That is, when students enter our classroom, whether it is the basic course or a business or technical communication course, they already have certain understandings about the norms of public presentations. More specifically, our analysis showed that students' understandings of public presentations include the idea that speaking is a coproduced, sometimes networked, engaging narrative. This finding alters traditional conceptions of the rhetorical situation, namely notions of audience as passive versus actively engaged, speaker presence as formal versus casual, and context as immediate versus mediated. Student attention to audience engagement via visual information, personal connection, and dynamic delivery suggests that the characteristics of electronic eloquence—enthusiasm, passion, and connection—serve to enhance audience members' ability to maintain attention and retain information. Thus, communication pedagogy must attend to these shifting rhetorical norms and audience expectations through reproducing the canons, reappropriating public presentation, and reconceiving presentations as engaging narratives.

Three key implications have emerged from this research that relate to electronic eloquence and the rhetorical situation: audience, delivery, and a redefinition of what it means to be a public speaker. Taken together, these implications enhance our understanding of how students learn in the digital age and how they use this knowledge to inform future behaviors.

One key implication of this research concerns the audience, in terms of both how audience affects level of formality and how notions of audience are broadened due to technological mediation and exposure to unique presentation exemplars. Although a majority of the students viewed TED talks as formal presentations, a number of them claimed that engaging a diverse

or lay audience rendered the speech informal. This notion that appealing to a diverse audience somehow reduces a presentation to an informal talk is curious and perhaps stems from the rather structured, linear approach that drives much presentation instruction, an approach in which students are asked to identify their audience (i.e., one targeted audience) and then design a specific, audience-centered message. The underlying assumption, of course, is that the speakers have the power—to craft the message, choose an organizational structure, develop particular supporting visuals, and practice delivering the speech in their own specific style. In contrast, a message crafted for a diverse or lay audience in some ways shifts the power from the speaker to the audience in that the speaker must assume responsibility for engaging the audience by incorporating the components of electronic eloquence. As a result, speakers need to create an engaging narrative that tells a cohesive story. They not only must develop speeches with attention to substantive information, but perhaps more important, they must speak passionately in order to connect with their audience.

Similarly, such digital delivery shifts the understanding of who the audience is or can be to include the virtual audience. To this extent, podcasts in the digital delivery era are mechanisms of messages that distance time and space. Not only are the messages available on the Internet for an extended period of time but also they can be paused, stopped, rewound, and fast-forwarded. Consequently, speakers need to consider both the face-to-face audience and the virtual audience. Virtual audiences respond in ways that demonstrate their co-ownership of a presentation (Porter, 2009) through tweeting, posting to Facebook, and invoking other social media outlets. Comments of approval or disapproval can be connected to most mediated presentations; thus, through technological mediation, even when viewing, audiences are active and, in a sense, coproducers in the narrative. In some ways, then, this coproduction shifts the power from speaker to audience, raising the stakes for speakers to be engaging and to personally connect with their audience through electronic eloquence. For instance, if a speaker is not particularly engaging or informative or fails to foster a connection, the audience can tune out and choose to participate in a different presentation event.

A second implication of our study relates to current conceptions of delivery, specifically the enthusiasm and passion with which information is presented and the subsequent effects. Specific vocal and physical techniques are not necessarily remarkable by themselves; rather, effective delivery can be characterized by the use of a successful interplay between such techniques, an engaging narrative, and visuals so that the audience is drawn

in and left with a lasting impression. Students' descriptions of delivery in terms of the effects of a speaker's vocal and physical elements coupled with visuals and an engaging narrative correspond to delivery as medium or the idea that delivery is coproduced with audiences (Welch, 1999). Further, this notion of the effects of delivery reinforces our argument that delivery needs to be retheorized for the digital age. Delivery, then, is becoming less about vocal and physical polish and rehearsal and more about characteristics of electronic eloquence, including enthusiasm, passion, and connection. Students' exposure to mediated presentations that are less polished and more dynamic suggests that we ought to reframe our discussions of delivery in contemporary public speaking courses to account for this shift in rhetorical norms and audience expectations.

These results also have implications for what it means to be a public speaker. Who speaks? In what forum? To what audience? Students are avid technology users and thus seem to appreciate a more nuanced understanding of what a public presentation is and who a public presenter is, as evidenced by their responses. Clearly, the notion of *public* in public presentation has shifted from the traditional public associated with formal address to include a broader audience of people both in real time, through live-streaming video, and after the fact. Further, the notion of *presenter* has expanded to include anyone speaking to any audience, actual or virtual. In a way, this notion has removed some of the mystique from traditional public address and has shifted the focus and power from the expert speaking to a targeted audience in a public setting to include anyone speaking to a (potentially) vast audience in real time and in virtual, mediated space. Expectations perhaps gleaned through vicarious learning have also shifted to include integrated technology and a dynamic, engaging style that connects and resonates with the audience. But these results do not suggest that previous conceptions of effective public speaking were devoid of audience consideration—quite the contrary. What these results do demonstrate is that notions of audience and audience expectations have shifted, in part due to the vicarious learning that has occurred through viewing presentations in the mediated environment. As a result, public speaking pedagogy must engage with shifting expectations, if not to attend to them, then to interrogate and critically evaluate them.

These results provide an interesting foundation for further inquiry; however, we acknowledge limitations to this study and offer recommendations for future research. First, we had unequal participation from each class and a drop off in responses between the first and second survey. We also recognize that engineering students made up half of our sample. While

we cannot be certain that results would have been different with a broader sample, we recommend sampling from a more diverse population. In addition, future work that includes students from a variety of courses will lead to a larger sample with which to explore students' perceptions through both detailed description and inferential statistical analysis, allowing for more nuanced understandings of vicarious learning to emerge. These understandings could enhance our preliminary results and their implications. Finally, we allowed students to choose from among three TED talks. We recognize that results might have been different if we had required all students in both courses to view the same talk.

Conclusion

Students' understandings and expectations about public presentation are informed by their vicarious learning through interacting with the mediated environment. Their participation in the digital age affects their perception of presentations as networked coproductions. More specifically, we are in an era in which students are constant creators of information. If they do not like it, they change it, comment on it, or reject it. They are active participants in the mediated environment, and this participation influences their motivation to act in particular ways. Whether conscious or not, exposure to podcasts and TED talks affects our students in that they attend to and interpret information and will be motivated to model behavior that they view as having positive consequences. TED talk speakers—while not professional, polished presenters—are engaging, dynamic, humorous, and well received by their live audiences. Students' exposure and positive response to such speakers require that we, as instructors, reimagine the ways we teach professional presentation in the electronic age. So how should our pedagogy incorporate electronic eloquence? And how might we reimagine our teaching of the traditional canons? We offer practical recommendations for teachers of business and technical communication.

TED talks represent technology, engineering, and design, among other disciplines, and for teachers of business and technical communication, these talks arguably represent a professional presentation genre that is effective at communicating innovative, technical information to a wide audience with the potential for supporting and engaging with an issue or idea. As such, TED talks can be powerful exemplars for teaching students how to command attention, disseminate ideas, and be persuasive. Thus, if students are learning that storytelling is an effective mode of persuasion, instructors could provide a firm grounding in communication strategies with an

emphasis on creating dynamic, engaging narratives. Such instruction is particularly relevant when thinking about the canons of invention and arrangement. In addition to teaching how to craft an argument and select a particular organizational structure, we can teach students to think about presentations as stories and urge them to think through the characters, plot line, adversity, and reconciliation. For example, an engineering instructor might encourage design teams to think about the proposal presentation as having various stakeholders (characters) who must grapple with specific constraints (plot line) and encounter a problem (adversity) that requires an innovative solution (reconciliation).

Since students in this study attended to the open, engaging, and enthusiastic delivery characterizing electronic eloquence, we should not only teach the vocal and physical aspects of delivery; we should also engage students in a discussion about the effects of delivery, specifically, the powerful interplay between storytelling, visuals, and interpersonal connection. This relationship between the verbal delivery and the visuals reinforces Cyphert's (2007) claim about the interrelationship between invention and arrangement. As teachers of public presentations, we should encourage students to think through this relationship between the canons to create a dynamic narrative whereby the visual elements serve not only to facilitate understanding and engage the audience but also as structural elements that can subtly move the story through to its logical conclusion. For example, a management instructor might require students to craft a sales pitch or business plan by including presentation media that include only visual images to supplement the speaker's dynamic delivery of information.

Also, we should emphasize that presentations prepared and created in the digital age never stop being delivered; that is, delivery has moved from being one live moment to being always present when shared in the mediated public sphere. TED talks should be discussed as a type of oral presentation and shown as exemplars that can enhance learning. As a practical assignment, in lieu of all presentations being face-to-face oral performances, we recommend including one mediated presentation so that students experience the notion of public presentation from a different perspective, especially with the implications of memory and delivery. We can also imagine incorporating the use of social media for students to view, participate, and critique the online presentations. Along these lines, the notion of digital delivery should be discussed, especially the unique considerations involved when presentations are always available and widely shared.

Finally, if students are learning that anyone (and not just professional speakers) can be an effective presenter, instructors can move beyond the

formulaic, memorized, polished focus characterizing much presentation instruction to teach some version of the orientation–incubation–composition method that Haynes (1990) advocated. This move will encourage students’ thinking about broad strategies to engage the audience within a given context.

Perhaps most important, we invite teachers to rethink the way that the canons are taught. That is, rather than introducing them separately and linearly, as is typical, we might position the canons as interconnected within the realm of electronic eloquence. In other words, style, delivery, invention, and arrangement come together to produce a dynamic, engaging presentation, whether that presentation reaches a limited, face-to-face audience in an auditorium or a broad, virtual audience on the Internet.

In short, we recommend a revitalizing of communication pedagogy in order to build on our strong tradition and, at the same time, account for a reproduction of the canons as interrelated, a reappropriation of public presentations as coproduced and mediated, and a reconceptualization of presentations as engaging, networked narratives. Rather than an approach that bifurcates old and new rhetoric, we advocate using the rhetorical canons to provide the foundation on which to build a 21st-century approach that embraces the personal connection and dynamism characterizing rhetorical norms in the electronic age.

Appendix A

Name: _____
Date: _____
Class: _____
Major: _____

TED Talks Questionnaire I

1. What do you know about TED talks? Describe the format.
2. Who is the intended audience for TED talks?
3. Typically, who gives TED talks?
4. Do presenters use technology when they deliver TED talks?
5. How are the TED talks disseminated to audiences?
6. What topics are typically covered during TED talks?
7. Do you think TED talks are representative of formal speaking events? Why or why not?

Appendix B

Name: _____

Date: _____

Class: _____

Major: _____

TED Talks Questionnaire II

Description: Your purpose is to watch one of the selected TED talks and answer the following questions. Answers should be thorough, thought-out, and in full-sentence format.

Pick one of the following TED talks: Click on link

Massimo Banzi “How Arduino is Open Sourcing Imagination”

Jeff Hancock “The Future of Lying”

Amos Winter “The Cheap All Terrain Wheelchair”

1. Which TED talk did you select and why?
2. What do you remember most about the talk?
3. Do you think TED talks are representative of formal speaking events? Why or why not?
4. Talk about the speaker’s engagement with the audience. Did they draw you in? If so how? What verbal or nonverbal strategies did they use?
5. Did they explain the context of their speech? If so how?
6. How did the speaker establish his or her ethos?
7. What type of an organizational strategy was used for their speech?
8. Based on the talk that you just watched, who do you think is the intended audience? How did the speaker attempt to adapt to this audience?
9. Comment on the speaker’s delivery. What aspects of vocal and/or physical delivery stood out to you and why?
10. Rate the speaker’s enthusiasm during their speech:

Not at all enthusiastic	Very enthusiastic
1 2 3 4 5	
11. Rate the effectiveness of the speaker’s visual aids:

Not at all effective	Very effective
1 2 3 4 5	
12. Were the visuals effective or ineffective? Why?

13. After watching a TED talk, how would you now describe a TED talk? What is the format?

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