

Hot Talk-Show

adapted from an article by Don Steinberg

- 1 Charlize Theron's appearance on *Hot Ones* wasn't her typical talk-show guest spot. "I hate my tongue right now. If I could pull it out, I would," the Oscar-winning actress said near the end, her eyes watering after she yelled obscenities at a bottle of spicy salsa.
- 2 Guests on *Hot Ones*, an online series with a format breaking from traditional TV, regularly freak out – and give candid interviews to audiences in the millions. On the program, which posts a new episode online every Thursday morning, host Sean Evans asks celebrities about their careers while together they eat 10 progressively spicier chicken wings. Episodes run around 22 minutes. The set is spartan: two chairs and a small, black table that can travel to wherever the celebrity is.
- 3 Condiments like Da Bomb Beyond Insanity and Blair's Mega Death appear to have a physiological impact on guests. Sniffles and tears burst loose. They try to douse the fire with milk, yogurt or rice. Their answers get more raw as the Scoville rating – a measure of hot-pepper hotness – rises to face-melting levels. It's a talk-show with its own story arc.
- 4 Hot peppers can cause the brain to release endorphins and dopamine, adding mild euphoria to the emotional distortion. "The hotness is the disruptive element. It's designed to knock our celebrity guests off their PR-driven flight pattern," says Mr. Evans, 31, who considers himself a guide leading guests on a voyage of discovery. "I'm going up the mountain with you, so it's a bonding experience. By wing six, we're best friends."
- 5 Even with 2.9 million YouTube views, the Charlize Theron episode isn't among the show's most widely seen. It lags behind installments featuring astrophysicist Neil deGrasse Tyson (7 million), rapper Post Malone (11 million), actors James Franco and Bryan Cranston (almost 6 million) and all-time leader Kevin Hart (13 million), in which the comedian weeps deliriously.
- 6 Plenty of YouTube sensations have amassed surprising numbers and passionate fans. Fewer have been able to cross over to attract mainstream guests and audiences. The online media company that produces it won't say if *Hot Ones* is profitable, 37 its production budget is low, its marketing is done via social media, and the company counts on a mix of revenue streams.
- 7 Not every guest eats all 10 wings. Comedian Jim Gaffigan, famous for loving junk food, surprised viewers by 'tapping out' early. "We've had people who, after the first one, said, 'That's kind of hot,' and you can't picture them finishing," Mr. Evans says. "But then they'll just suck it up and power through. I think it says something about the human spirit."



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