



How “social” is Social TV? The influence of social motives and expected outcomes on the usage of Social TV applications



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ABSTRACT

Social TV applications have become increasingly popular. Building on first results on motives for usage, we aim to provide a comprehensive overview of factors that influence the likelihood of using Social TV applications. Based on theoretical approaches which consider the need to belong to be a fundamental human motivation, a special focus lay on identifying the relative impact of social variables such as social motives as well as expected social outcomes in the sense of social gratifications. An online survey of Social TV users ($N = 101$) demonstrated that the general frequency of Social TV usage is predicted by the motives to communicate with others, to gather information and to be entertained as well as the perceived social gratification of increased enjoyment, while there was no significant influence of demographic variables and personality aspects such as extraversion and need to belong. When predicting usage frequency of specific platforms such as Twitter and WhatsApp, however, different patterns emerge: While Twitter usage is influenced by the motive to receive information and to communicate, WhatsApp usage is predicted first and foremost by the need to belong. These results underline the need to differentiate between different platforms and facets of Social TV and highlight the importance of social variables and expected gratifications, which extends prior work on general motives. In terms of practical implications the results suggest that Social TV providers should more carefully cater for the diverging goals of obtaining social and informational gains.

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1. Introduction

In the early days of television people gathered around the rare TV-sets and later on families and friends met up to jointly view their favorite shows. Nowadays, the availability of low-priced technology as well as an abundant number of channels and programs alongside with changes in demography and lifestyle has made television more and more an activity that is pursued in solitude (Harboe, 2009). However, in the last few years, the advent of Social TV has been observed, with people using different social media platforms to discuss what they are watching on classic media channels (Han & Lee, 2014). The emergence of new forms of discussing media content on the Internet by using social media platforms has led to unprecedented possibilities to connect with other people – even to a greater extent than it is possible with physically present co-viewers. Social TV enables people to connect

with friends, family as well as with (partly unknown) communities and the public while viewing.

Indeed, user data as reported by IAB Europe (2014) show that 53% of Europeans watch TV and are online at the same time. This is even more pronounced in 16–24-year-old users, the vast majority of whom are so-called multi-screener: 84% go online while watching TV and 34% are even online for a third of their viewing time. More interestingly, 33% of all users who are online during TV consumption state that the online activity is likely to be related to the TV programme they are watching. This might, of course, include searching for information on one of the actors – as the platforms which are used most frequently are search engines (68%, statista.de). However, nearly as frequently people refer to social media apps (55%) as well as social media websites (52%). Furthermore, the number of tweets sent during a specific program using its name as hashtag allows conclusions about the amount of social interaction that is targeted at discussing shared media events. Given that popular TV programmes can draw as many as 13.8 million Tweets (Grammy Awards 2014) and considering research that also Facebook and instant message services like WhatsApp have been shown to be used to discuss TV programs

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with friends (see Han & Lee, 2014), it can be concluded that discussing TV events via social media is a common practice nowadays.

So far, research has predominantly targeted Twitter usage during TV watching in order to describe what users actually post (Highfield, Harrington, & Bruns, 2013; Wohn & Na, 2011). However, another important question to ask is why people engage in this kind of behavior. Preliminary answers to this question suggest that the massive online communication during classical media usage is highly unlikely to be merely a temporary phenomenon; rather, it can be traced back to the fundamental human need to belong in the sense of humans' pervasive drive to form and maintain meaningful relationships as described by Baumeister and Leary (1995). In this regard, numerous scholars have empirically shown that the individual need to belong predicts not only the willingness to engage in but also the actual usage of social media (Krämer et al., 2013; Nadkarni & Hofmann, 2012; Reich & Vorderer, 2013). In line with these considerations, first research on Social TV applications has targeted personality as a factor influencing usage and motives (Cohen & Lancaster, 2014). Also, scholars have begun to identify motives for usage (Geerts & De Grooff, 2009; Han & Lee, 2014), partly extending the uses and gratification approach. Although social aspects obviously play a role and have already been described as an important motive, the social outcomes in the sense of social gratifications obtained by using Social TV have not been addressed explicitly. Theoretically, we therefore draw on Slater's (2007) reinforcing spiral paradigm and suggest that in the case of Social TV the social outcomes obtained (and expected) can influence selection and usage.

As research on Social TV is still scarce, the present study aims to provide a first comprehensive overview of factors that influence the likelihood of using Social TV applications. Therefore, we include socio-demographic and personality variables, but focus in particular on motives for usage as well as more specifically on the social gratifications that are obtained or expected by the viewers. Accordingly, we aim to show the relative impact of individual versus social aspects. The primary research question guiding this paper, therefore is: To what extent do social variables such as social gratifications influence the Social TV usage?

Additionally, we wanted to know which kind of Internet-mediated communication is predominantly used. Here, substantial differences between using micro-blogging services like Twitter, social networking sites like Facebook or instant messaging services such as WhatsApp can be expected. These platforms differ with regard to the availability in terms of public versus private postings, the audience (known versus unknown) and fragmentation (continuity of posts, interaction possible versus fragmented content as, for example, when tweeting alongside thousands of other people). As the (yet unknown) relative frequency of their usage also has important implications for the functions and gratifications of Social TV, we aim to explore the employment of different kinds of platforms. Therefore, the second overarching research question of this paper is: To what extent are different platforms used and do the motives and gratifications of their usage differ?

Before we present method and results, we discuss the current literature on joint television viewing, summarize results on what is being posted and refer to knowledge on motives, social gratifications as well as personality factors influencing the usage of social media during TV watching.

2. Watching television with others

TV viewing has always been a partly social activity. On the one hand, Oehlberg, Ducheneaut, Thornton, Moore, and Nickell (2006) describe that contents are discussed with co-viewers who are

present in the same room (direct sociability), on the other hand, contents are discussed the next day with colleagues (indirect sociability). The latter have been aptly termed water cooler moments by Lochrie and Coulton (2012b). Recently, the emergence of social media platforms like microblogging services, social networking sites or instant messaging made it possible to connect with others and conduct real-time interactions with other TV viewers despite their physical distance (Hambrick, Simmons, Greenhalgh, & Greenwell, 2010; Lochrie & Coulton, 2012b). This phenomenon has been termed Social TV and Harboe, Massey, Metcalf, Wheatley, and Romano (2008) accordingly defined it as "using communication technology to connect TV-viewers, in order to create remotely shared experiences around TV content" (see also Harboe, 2009, p. 7).

Additionally, it has been distinguished whether the conversation with others is conducted on the same device which is used for watching ("one screen" enabled by smart- or hybrid TVs) or whether an additional device (e.g. laptop, smartphone, tablet) is used ("second screen", see Lochrie & Coulton, 2012a). As of today, second screen is more common due to the lack of dissemination of smart- or hybrid TV-sets. In order to interact, several channels and programs offer official fanpages on Facebook or specific Social TV apps that allow people to express their opinions, but there are also applications which are independent of the channels (e.g. the app couchfunk with 600,000 users). Besides this, people employ general social media platforms like Twitter, Facebook or WhatsApp in order to share their experiences (Lochrie & Coulton, 2012c). Cesar & Geerts, 2011) summarize that Social TV changes the way people watch TV, for example by rendering the medium less passive but rather active (Buschow, Schneider, & Ueberheide, 2014).

Of the platforms named above, Twitter usage has been analyzed most extensively as the communication is public. Tweets differ not only with regard to valence (from positive and friendly comments to negative and aggressive comments) but also with regard to addressees: Some are targeted at peers, others at media characters or producers. In the following, we give a short overview on results concerning the contents of the Tweets in order to understand the function that the Tweets or postings might serve. Based on this, we will subsequently focus on potential predictors for Social TV activities.

2.1. Empirical studies on online interactions during television – what is being posted?

There are several studies which analyzed the comments that were posted during specific TV programs. Wohn and Na (2011) categorized Tweets into four different kinds of comments: (1) Attention-seeking – referencing to the own person, (2) Information – messages on the program (3) Emotion – messages with subjective reference to the own person, (4) Opinion – messages with subjective opinions on the program. This study showed that frequency of message type is dependent on the specific media contents. A study by Burghardt, Karsten, Pflammer, and Wolff (2013) also revealed that the contents of the Tweets follow the suspense patterns of the program and are closely related to the content that is aired (McDonald, Lin, Anderegg, Na, and Dale (2014) showed that during the reception of drama series, people with different viewing motives posted different Tweets. People with instrumental motives post more detailed Tweets and predominantly post after the broadcast. People with ritualized motives and critical motives rather post during the broadcast. Incidental fans post detailed and enthusiastic comments. Buschow et al. (2014) found that evaluations of the program and of the media characters were prevalent. Talk-shows yielded different comments (a large number of retweets) than talent shows (which predominantly lead to posts concerning the candidates).

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