The impact of engagement motives for social TV on social presence and sports channel commitment

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ABSTRACT

Grounded in the uses and gratifications framework and the existing body of research on mediated sports consumption, we examined young television viewers' motives for communicating with others while watching the televised Olympics and their feelings of social presence and sports channel commitment. To fulfill the goal, we conducted a survey of Korean college students who engaged in social TV experiences during the 2012 London Olympic Games. Employing structural equation modeling, each motivational factor of backchannel communication was used to predict respondents' social presence and sports channel commitment. The results showed that information and excitement motives of social TV positively related to social presence, while convenience and information motives positively predicted sports channel commitment.

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1. Introduction

In an exploratory study of viewing motives and behaviors associated with televised sports, Gantz (1981) found that sports program viewers, while watching, were more interactive with others and involved in the programs than other entertainment programming. Although the observation was interesting, the viewers' engagement in communication with others has been limited to talking or expressing emotional reactions (e.g., yelling in displeasure) in the presence of friends or families who are co-viewing the event (Gantz, 1981). However, the rapid rise of social networking sites (SNSs) is expanding the user engagement into virtual places where millions of users engage in real-time sharing of their own and others' opinions and emotional reactions while watching televised mega-sporting events such as the World Cup or Olympics (Highfield et al., 2013; Shirazi et al., 2011). This second-screen activity or using SNSs in the TV experience is called social television (TV) (Lim et al., 2015; Proulx and Shepatin, 2012; Shin, 2013). This social TV phenomenon was best observed during the 2012 Summer Olympics at an unprecedented scale, which led to great attention from television producers, sponsors, and even from App developers (Bodhani, 2012; Griffith, 2011; Shirazi et al., 2011). As Highfield et al. (2013) aptly noted, television producers and sponsors are increasingly interested in "how such second-screen activity might change television viewing habits" (p. 317).

Despite the growing adoption of social TV experiments in the broadcasting industry, little scholarship has been devoted to understanding the psychological motives and behaviors of social TV users. The current research aims to examine the backchannel communication motives in the consumption of a televised mega-sporting event—the 2012 Summer

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Olympics. We also note that this conception of social TV is closely connected to the theory of social presence (Shin, 2013; Xu and Yan, 2011). Kim and Biocca (1997) discussed that the sense of presence in the mediated environment would explain television audiences' interactions with other viewers. The engagement and interactions of the public with televised live events is exciting news to both broadcasters and sponsors. It is believed that social TV experience ultimately enhances viewers' feelings of social presence (Hassoun, 2012; Hutchins, 2010; Lim et al., 2015) and their commitment to the broadcasting brand or the sports channel (Hechelmann, 2012; Lim et al., 2015; Proulx and Shepatin, 2012). This current study aims to explore this uncharted territory by studying backchannel communication motives during the televised Olympic Games and by studying how these motives are related to viewers' feelings of social presence and their sports channel commitment.

2. Literature review

2.1. Social TV

Over the past decade, the consumption of television sports programming has considerably evolved as sports fans can consume sports in many different ways (Dwyer and Kim, 2011; Ha et al., 2013; Mahan, 2011). Particularly, the advancement of social networking technologies has altered the viewing experience of some sports fans, allowing them to interact with other fans in real time through social networking sites (SNSs) while watching a televised mega-sporting event such as Olympics (Ha et al., 2013). Social TV in this study is defined as real-time backchannel communication on social networking sites (SNSs) during a live television broadcast (Lim et al., 2015). This real-time user engagement with television programs has been increasingly altering the way that broadcasters engage the audience in their programming. Today, most popular live shows on television incorporate selected tweets back into the shows to engage their audience with their programs (Harrington et al., 2012). Professionals in sports fields clearly recognize the importance of social TV phenomena of mega-sporting events such as the Olympics, and they invest in technologies and systems that enable people to engage with the sport during programming (Bodhani, 2012).

A question emerges: what motivates the viewers to use SNSs during live televised events, especially live televised sports events? While a few researchers (Hassoun, 2012; Hutchins, 2010) have described the recent trend of sports television viewers' communicating with others through SNSs, no published research to date has examined the engagement motives for social TV during the live televised sports events. Since social TV is a byproduct of convergence of television and SNSs (Proulx and Shepatin, 2012), we assume that motives for social TV can be sought by integrating uses and gratifications (U&G) research on television sports programming and SNSs.

2.2. A uses and gratifications (U&G) approach to social TV

While the conception of the active audience has long been discussed ever since Katz et al. (1973) changed the paradigm of audience research, today's audiences actively consume even more media than ever before. Newer generations of media consumers are continuously updating their activity as they send and receive information synchronously via SNS or instant messaging (IM) on their mobile devices (Ha et al., 2015). In this ambient media environment, there is a need to explore the instrumental use of SNSs for communicating and interacting with others while watching a live event on television such as televised Olympics or the World Cup. To determine what motivates the use of SNS among viewers of live televised events, especially among those viewers of live sports events, it is essential to integrate the traditional motives of televised sports with the newer motives of backchannel communication during the televised sporting events.

Several studies have examined the motives for watching sports on television and revealed a few common motives for sports television viewing (Gantz, 1981; Raney, 2006) such as information-seeking, entertainment/excitement-seeking, and social motives. Along with traditional viewing motives for sports television, we note that a convenience motive (Hicks et al., 2012; Kim et al., 2011; Whiting, 2013) is increasingly meaningful in explaining the social TV of live sports on television. First, television sports viewers want to learn about players, teams and games by watching the sports on television (Gantz, 1981; Raney, 2006). Users of SNSs are reported to have higher information seeking motives (Ha et al., 2015). Researchers who studied the impact of Internet technology on learning motives found that users on SNSs have a detail-oriented and specialized *information-seeking motive* in their use of technology. Second, researchers have identified enjoyment as one of the most important motives for using television (Ferguson and Perse, 2000) and social networking sites (Chung and Koo, 2015; Lin and Lu, 2011; Park et al., 2009). Slightly related but probably more important motives—that is, *excitement motives*—were also identified (Gantz, 1981; Raney, 2006; Westmyer et al., 1998). When the favored team wins or there is a great performance or moment during the sport event, viewers experience excitement and emotional satisfaction. Gantz (1981) states that this excitement factor or "thrill in victory" is the most important motive for televised sports viewing. Therefore, excitement motives are a more appropriate label to indicate sports fans' engagement motives for social TV during a mega-sporting event, although there is a more encompassing term such as hedonic motives or pleasure motives (Westmyer et al., 1998).

Finally, new media scholars have identified a unique motive that better explains the young generation's reliance on the Internet and social media. Generally, younger people these days show different motives and behavioral patterns in using a