Full length article

Shifting from an audience to an active public in social viewing: Focusing on the discussion network

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ABSTRACT

The use of online media to talk with co-viewers while watching television, is dramatically increasing. The current study assesses the relationship between social viewing and cognitive elaboration of television content, particularly focusing on the discussion network (social capital and cross-cutting talk) with co-viewers. Results from an online survey among South Koreans ($N = 500$) suggest that the amount of social viewing does not directly increase cognitive elaboration; but bridging social capital mediates the relationship. As predicted, a positive relationship was shown between social viewing and cross-cutting talk (i.e., talking with others who have opposing opinions), and moreover, cross-cutting talk mediated the relationship between social viewing and cognitive elaboration. This study is expected to open the gateway for discussions on social viewing in the context of the discussion network.

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1. Introduction

Television viewing has often been regarded as an isolating activity that deprives viewers of social interactions (Bickham & Rich, 2006; Winn, 2002). However, television plays a central role in constructing interpersonal relationships (Lull, 1980). Television appears to be a "ticket to talk," fostering social activity between television viewers (Sacks, 1992). In addition, the connectedness that Web 2.0 fosters is providing people opportunities to join in the *participatory culture*, lowering barriers so that they can share opinions with each other (Jenkins, 2006).

Technology innovation has affected television viewing and the way people exchange thoughts. The emergence of the internet, as well as social media (e.g., Facebook, Twitter), has made it possible for remote interactions to occur among television viewers (Ducheneaut, Moore, Oehlberg, Thornton, & Nickell, 2008). Social viewing, in this sense, has been defined as the integration of traditional television viewing and online discussions with other co-viewers. Recent data show that around 80% of people use a second

screen device (e.g., tablet, smartphone) while watching television (Tribbey, 2014) to view others' opinions, post comments, and chat with co-viewers about TV content in real time (Larsson & Moe, 2012; Smith & Boyles, 2012). Hence, social viewing has opened a new gateway for television viewers to engage in social commentary on TV content, fostering in them active and critical thinking about the content they are viewing (Elmer, 2012). In this sense, social viewing has led to the creation of a mediated public sphere.

With the growing importance of social viewing in the era of online media in mind, the present research aims to provide empirical findings of a linkage between social viewing and cognitive elaboration of television content in terms of a deliberative democracy. Furthermore, this paper focuses on the intervening role of the discussion network (i.e, bonding and bridging social capital, cross-cutting exposure) to deeply understand the role of social viewing in providing "social glue" to both acquaintances and strangers in a virtual community (Chorianopoulos & Lekakos, 2008). Considering that exposure to dissimilar opinions can occur in both politically oriented online activities and in other leisure-related casual online talk (Wojcieszak & Mutz, 2009), this study examines the potential role of social viewing in discussions among diversified people and explores in large part the potential linkage between discussion network, social viewing, and cognitive

elaboration of television content. Hence, the primary research questions in this study are: Does social viewing affect the formation of cognitive elaboration? If so, to what extent do discussion networks influence the linkage? By answering these questions, this study expands the theoretical avenue of social viewing that has not been discussed among media scholars.

2. Theoretical background

2.1. The background of social viewing

With the development of media technologies, television viewers are shifting from being passive audiences to active audiences. According to a report released in 2015, 87% of television consumers use a second screen (e.g., smartphone, laptop/desktop, tablet) while simultaneously watching television (Flomenbaum, 2015). The Council for Research Excellence also reported that one in five Americans, ages 15 to 54, use social media daily in relation to their television viewing (Rao, 2014). These figures show that, increasingly, today's television viewers are having real time discussions with other viewers during television viewing (Highfield, Harrington, & Bruns, 2013; Tribbey, 2014). In this context, social viewing, defined as a combination of television viewing and social discussion using online media on a second screen during air time or after, has created an engaged and communal experience for television viewers (Cohen & Lancaster, 2014; Shin, 2013).

The concept of "social viewing" has been used interchangeably with the other related terms: second screening (Doughty, Rowland, & Lawson, 2012), dual screening (Vaccari, Chadwick, & O'Loughlin, 2015), dual viewing (Cameron & Geidner, 2014), social TV (Cesar & Geerts, 2011; Krämer, Winter, Benninghoff, & Gallus, 2015; Selva, 2016; Shin, 2013), or co-viewing (Doughty, Rowland, & Lawson, 2011). These diverse terms indicate that social viewing is a relatively new concept that has not been theoretically explicated. While sharing many commonalities, these terms have subtle differences from one another.

Second screening is the act of television viewing with an additional second screen, such as a mobile device (Doughty et al., 2012). Hence, second screening approaches social viewing from a technological perspective, since researchers underscore the use of a second screen device when employing this term. Another technological approach to social viewing is social TV, using software and hardware systems that allow for online mediated viewing. Social TV has been most actively studied by computer scientists who are attempting to develop interactive television programs and hardware that would foster interactions among television viewers (Weisz et al., 2007). These interactive programs would allow viewers to indicate by the use of clickable icons, what program they are watching, invite friends to watch the same program, post emotion icons (emoticons) on the television screen, and chat with each other while watching television together; in other words, interactive programs would allow viewers to interact with distant others who are watching the same program.

Similar to interactive programs, dual screening refers to "the bundle of practices that involve integrating, and switching across and between, live broadcast media and social media, particularly Facebook and Twitter" (Vaccari et al., 2015, p. 1041); the focal point of dual screening however, lies in the individuals' usage of social media platforms before/during/or after television viewing. Specifically, researchers focus on studying dual screening to describe individuals' specific attitudes and behaviors while watching broadcast shows. Meanwhile, co-viewing has been traditionally studied to explain television viewing experiences with family members or friends in the same physical place, such as a living room (e.g., Banjo, Appiah, Wang, Brown, & Walther, 2015;

Paavonen, Roine, Pennonen, & Lahikainen, 2009). Co-viewing has most often been studied in the traditional television viewing context.

In this study, we suggest a concept called "social viewing" which encompasses past discussions on dual viewing, second screening, social TV, and co-viewing. Incorporating discussions of past studies, social viewing in this study is theorized as follows: It emphasizes that social viewers can partake in a virtually communal experience of television viewing with other co-viewers through the use of online media (e.g., blog, comments, chatting, messenger, etc.) pre, post, and during television viewing. In this sense, features of social viewing include remote chatting during television viewing, posting comments about television content, and sharing and recommending television content to others (Cesar & Geerts, 2011). As television viewers feel connected with co-viewers through the use of a second screen, the ability to establish interpersonal relationships in a virtual sphere should be considered as being a decisive factor that facilitates social viewing participation (Hwang & Lim, 2015). Social viewing is a broad construct that explains television viewing experiences with other viewers in online-mediated environments, which includes selection of program, discussion of television content, and the effects of television viewing that occur in the post-viewing phase, such as formation of a virtual viewing community and elaborating on television content.

Traditionally, television viewing has been defined as an experience of isolation because it lacks social interaction (Davis, 2011). This phenomenon has become more intense since the introduction of multiple channels and individualized media such as smartphones and tablets. Hoynes (1994) argues that television viewing is an experience of isolation that discourages actual human relationship. Adding to this, Putnam (1995a) criticized television for discouraging civic engagement because television viewing decreases face-to-face talks that form the basis for community and establish social capital, factors that indicate the sum of resources that were built up through mutual human relationships (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992; Coleman, 1988). However, other scholars refuted the negative role of television by arguing that television viewing can facilitate sociability, both in direct (e.g., having talks with friends and family while watching television programs) and indirect (e.g., discussing television programs with colleagues at work) forms (Ducheneaut et al., 2008; Oehlberg, Ducheneaut, Thornton, Moore, & Nickell, 2006). Recently, the role of television in social interactions has grown because of the emergence of online media platforms such as instant messaging and social media, which reconnect isolated viewers in real time (Hambrick, Simmons, Greenhalgh, & Greenwell, 2010; Lochrie & Coulton, 2012).

Despite diverse discussions on social viewing, the extant literature has not yet focused on the relationship between social viewing and cognitive elaboration of television content. Most previous studies on social viewing have conducted television content analyses to find out what television viewers talk about on social media (e.g., Buschow, Schneider, & Ueberheide, 2014) or have studied the psychological effects of social viewing (e.g., Lin & McDonald, 2007). This study focuses on finding out the meaning of the mediated public sphere by examining the effects of social viewing on fostering cognitive elaboration.

2.2. Social viewing and cognitive elaboration

Social viewing shares many similarities with participating in deliberative discussions in the public sphere. In this sense, social viewing is regarded as expanding opportunities for television viewers to participate in the mediated public sphere. Choi (2014) argues that social viewing makes television viewers watch a program more rationally and critically, rather than emotionally. The