

Where Television Meets Social Media: A Study on Television-Viewing Habits as Adjusted by
Social Media

Kyle A. Davis, Jacob M. Duchscher, and Jada C. Stotts

Austin Peay State University

Author's Note:

This research paper is intended to serve as the final paper for Dr. Yunying Zhang's
Communication 5000, Methods of Research at Austin Peay State University.

Abstract

This paper intends to look at the relationship of television and social media. Specifically, it examines how social media might enhance or diminish a person's enjoyment of television when used in conjunction with television viewing. The growth of social media has allowed for a new way of watching TV, wherein viewer interact with each other over social media as they watch a particular program together. Called live tweeting when this phenomenon takes place on Twitter, it has taken to being called social TV amongst many communication scholars, and will be referred to as such going forward. The research hopes to learn if participating in social TV has an effect on a number of factors, namely, a viewer's excitement level of their favorite television programs, a viewer's sense that they are part of a community as a fan of their favorite television programs, and a viewer's propensity for participating in social TV based on their general social media use. To conduct this research, a survey was administered via Survey Monkey in the fall of 2016.

Keywords: social TV, social television, live tweeting

Over the years, the various social media have seen massive growth, becoming the go-to Internet tool for many. Whether it is to curb the occasional boredom, keep in contact with old friends, find new ones, or simply to keep up with the high-speed world news of the day, many have found a personal use for social media. One such use for the media platform that has arisen in recent years is the advent of social TV.

Social TV is the idea that a viewer of a television program can use social media while watching TV to interact with other viewers of the same program, or in some instances, the creators and producers of the program. When this happens on Twitter, it is commonly called live tweeting. Apart from the viewers of a television program, many television shows have their own pages on social media, which someone who works on the show can use to write posts to followers, strike up conversations with them, and make the program itself more interactive for viewers when it airs on live television. In this way, social TV becomes a bastion of common interest.

Were this phenomenon to become a standard for someone, it could allow them to build friendships with others in a way that was previously not thought possible, putting emphasis on the social aspect of social media. Further, the ability to interact with the creators of one's favorite television program is a prospect that sounds exciting on paper. It provides the opportunity to ask baffling questions about a show's narrative to the people better suited to answer them than anybody else, or chance to simply thank them directly for the work that they do. None of these things were possible before, but like many other things, social media has made it possible.

Because of the interactive nature of social TV – and social media as a whole – it also turns the act of watching television into a potentially interactive pastime, where no interaction

between viewer and program, or even viewers and other viewers, existed before. It has been suggested that this level of interaction could increase a viewer's engagement with their favorite television programs, providing them with a greater level of excitement than previously thought possible before social TV. This is important, because television is already a favorite medium for so many. The narratives told over the airwaves have been the inspiration for many conversations amongst friends and coworkers – often called 'water cooler talk' in the case of the latter. Waiting for a new episode from week to week is made less frustrating by discussing the current week's episode with others, and social media has the ability to enhance that notion.

Due to its ability to engage viewers, this study seeks to determine if participating in social TV has any effect on a viewer's television-viewing habits beyond killing time. Specifically, it looks at whether social TV enhances a person's excitement level for television and the sense of community they feel as a viewer of a television program.

Literature Review

The scholarly articles that have been found and researched are to give a better understanding of the topic of social television. Throughout this literature review, key concepts such as Twitter, SecondSync, specific television shows and other concepts will be highlighted and discussed. Twitter was found to be the most used form of social media in this area. Several researchers like Cameron and Geidner (2014), Giglietto and Selva (2014), Greer and Ferguson (2011), Larsson (2013), and Wilson (2016) all focused on Twitter and how the social media outlet was able to enhance television.

Wilson's (2016) article focuses heavily on Twitter. According to Harry McCracken, as cited by Wilson, "The reason for Twitter's popularity is...that 'as with many things on the

Internet, community trumps technology – and Twitter is where there’s a thriving community of TV fans” (2016). Twitter is a place where people can have that community that connects them with people who watch the same television shows. Twitter isn’t just a benefit to the public but also for broadcasters and advertisers. Wilson also points to a program called SecondSync, which gives those two groups the ability to utilize Twitter as well. SecondSync is a U.K.-based company that monitors online talk and provides analytic data to broadcasters and advertisers. This company announced a partnership with Facebook initially, but moved forward with Twitter. SecondSync believed that Twitter is the only place to host real-time conversations about TV on a large scale.

Like Wilson, Hassoun’s (2014) research also focused on the social media outlet, Twitter. Throughout his research, Hassoun refers to the multi-screen experience as simultaneous media use, or SMU. SMU is defined as use of a second screen while viewing television. Hassoun’s research found the positives and negatives of multiple screens. Hassoun (2014) found that after failing to attract much interest in a companion app for its show, *Grey’s Anatomy*, ABC acknowledged that, although the technology was in a “frothy experimental stage,” there might be a limited audience for second screen materials accompanying scripted programs. It was found that multiple screens caused problems at times. Many times the second screen became a distraction, one that drew the viewer away from the television not to communicate over social media about the show, but towards something else entirely. Hassoun found that media are consumed not in sequence, but in simultaneity with each other: texting while at the movie-theater, visiting Facebook while watching television, and a near-infinite assortment of other combinations dividing users’ attentions among multiple media at once. So, not only does

multiple screens sometimes become a distraction, it was found that it can be difficult at times for producers to use multiple screens to their advantage.

Webster and Kziazek (2012) examine the idea of audience fragmentation. This research examined the overlap of media watching and predicted future findings. Webster and Kziazek's (2012) research found that the audience of any given outlet, whether it is popular or not, will overlap with other outlets at a similar level. Two devices were used in order to receive this information: a traditional People Meter on television sets, and a NetSight Meter, which are both Nielsen devices. Going back to Wilson's findings, he found that second screens were many times seen as a distraction but Webster and Kziazek's research didn't have clear findings to support that point.

Narrowing the focus, Larsson (2012) studied a specific Swedish current events talk show called Hubinette. Larsson took advantage of hashtags and gathered data on the amount of times the show's name was hash tagged, "#hubinette," between August 29, 2011 and October 26, 2011. They found that most interactions and messages sent by viewers involved the host of the program. Giglietto and Selva (2014) also studied the social media interactions between viewers, conducting a study on a full season of tweets about television talk shows. 2,489,669 tweets over a total of 1,076 episodes were analyzed. With Twitter opening up and giving the audience the ability to communicate during shows and have that connection between themselves and the creators of the show, Giglietto and Selva found that the once silent public is craving more interactivity with the television they watch.

Lochrie and Coulton (2012) take an approach much different than other scholars in the way that instead of focusing on the whole of television and Twitter, they simply focus on a few television programs, one of them being the TV show *The X Factor*. In their paper, Lochrie and

Coulton do an analysis of the tweets that were sent out in reference to the 2011 season of *The X Factor*, both for the UK version and the USA version. The USA version received a larger pool of tweets due to the fact that starting in 2011, the show introduced a “vote by tweet” in which viewers voted for their favorite contestant via the direct messaging on Twitter.

Schirra, et al. (2014) explore another UK television hit, *Downton Abbey*, looking specifically at the third season and a sample of 2,234 live tweeters who participated between the time of the premier up until the finale. In order to acquire the initial sample of live-tweeters, Schirra, et al. ran a TweepQL [10] query for the keywords “downton abbey” and “downtonabbey” during the first episode of the season. This query found a total of 26,540 tweets from a total of 13,828 unique users. To help narrow the sample size, users who only issued one tweet about the show were eliminated from the study. It was found that nearly a third of users returned each week to tweet about the program. Going even more in-depth than simply looking at the number of tweets, Schirra, et al. use semi-structured interviews with 11 diverse live tweeters in an attempt to understand the reason that they live tweet. It is discovered that the decision to live tweet is dependent upon a variety of personal considerations and social conventions, which include the desire to feel connected to a larger community that is interested in the same show.

As the experience of dual screening and live tweeting has grown since the conception of Twitter, and even more so in the recent years, some television shows have begun to embrace the concept, AMC’s *The Walking Dead* being one of them. In 2012, AMC began providing a service on its website that allows viewers to synchronize their commentary with others watching the program, even if the program is being watched on different days and times. This service is called Story Sync. Auverset and Billings discuss the overall use of Twitter and live tweeting with the *Walking Dead* as well as the new Story Sync website application. The data for this research was

acquired from publicly available conversations on Twitter during the premier of the first three episodes of *The Walking Dead*'s fifth season. DiscoverText was used to gather the tweets. A total of 174,076 tweets were collected for the three episodes, the data was narrowed down by first removing all non-English tweets, and then every 60th tweet was analyzed making up a total sample size of 2,977 tweets. Auverset and Billings found that Social TV is about more than isolated immediate reactions to television. Instead, Social TV involves behaviors and cognitions before, during, and after watching television programming.

Powers (2014) offers a look at how the television sketch show, *Portlandia*, uses social media to engage with its viewers, and market to potential new viewers. In his article, Powers points to the unique format of *Portlandia*, explaining that although episodes tangentially connect, the show can still be viewed and understood without having seen previous episodes. This works in the show's favor, as its focus on vignettes allows for the posting of singular and marketable videos from the show online. This offers easily digestible chunks of the program to people who could become new viewers. While many creators frown upon their content being available online for free, *Portlandia*'s network, IFC, encourages this by offering content from the show on multiple online channels, including Amazon, iTunes, and Xbox. Sketches from the show are even uploaded on IFC's website, Facebook page, YouTube page, and Hulu. The idea behind offering so much free content online is that it will be shared, 'liked,' and commented on, ultimately widening the audience of the show.

Popular networks like IFC aren't the only networks to use social media as a promotional tool. According to research conducted by Greer and Ferguson (2011), many local television stations are doing the same. The research duo examined 488 local television stations in the United States, their goal being exploring how stations are using Twitter for branding and

marketing purposes. Due to the large numbers of posts from looking at so many stations, only the first page of each account was analyzed. It was found that the content of commercial stations and public stations differs slightly. Commercial stations most often focused their tweets on information, but lacked proper branding and identification, whereas public stations focused more on station identification, and attracting followers to on-air programming or the station's official website.

The social media presence of a particular television program is not always construed as a good thing, and some researchers focus on how social media might negatively affect programming. Specifically, van Es and Jacobson both feel that some television programs are sacrificing creative freedom in favor of a presence on social media. Van Es (2016) chose to focus her research by looking at multiple seasons of NBC's *The Voice*. She sees cause for concern in the way *The Voice* handles its conversation with the audience on social media. While more interactive than most other shows, she believes the producers of *The Voice* sacrifice creative liberties of the show by giving viewers too much influence over what happens on it, allowing viewers to vote who remains on the show through social media. While Jacobson (2013) doesn't quite see it as a bad thing, she focuses her research on the influence viewers have through social media on another show, *The Rachel Maddow Show*. She hypothesized that social media discussion had an influence on what topics were discussed on the program. Ultimately, she concluded that her hypothesis was correct, and that topics discussed on the show correlated strongly with what viewers discussed on social media. The research conducted by these two indicates that there is compelling evidence to support that viewers do sometimes have an influence on the creative direction of a TV show by the interactions had on social media.

There has also been research conducted on the effects that viewers have on each other on social media. Cameron and Geidner (2014) discuss the use of what they call continuous response measures, or CRM's. In their article, a CRM is defined as a graph that aggregates the opinions of individuals measured during the consumption of media. The authors offer the 2004 presidential election as an example. During this election, CNN showed the first on-screen CRM, which displayed the opinions of a focus group that was watching the debate. Cameron and Geidner suggest that viewers will conform to the majority opinion if one is available to them, asserting that viewers will agree with the consensus of any given visual media. Using past performances from American Idol, participants watched two videos, both of which featured a performance from a top ten, non-winning male contestant. The videos included either a positive-leaning or negative-leaning graphic of a Twitter feed, in addition to a control video which had no Twitter-based CRM. Participants were placed into groups, each of which watched one of these videos. The authors also performed another study with the same structure that looked at political content. Their hypothesis that viewers would agree with the general consensus was supported. This research provides evidence that Twitter posts are capable of affecting the opinions of viewers.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

In conducting this research, there were several research questions and hypotheses in mind. They are as follows.

RQ1: Does participating in social TV regarding a particular television program have a direct effect on the level of excitement a viewer feels for said program?

H1: There will be a positive correlation between a person's level of excitement for the television they watch and the social media they consume, specifically during live airings of shows.

It is posited that viewers who engage with social media while watching television will be more engaged with the program itself, so as not to miss out on potential discussion on social media.

RQ2: Does participating in social TV regarding a particular program enhance the feeling of being a part of a community that a viewer can feel as a fan of said program?

H2: There will be a positive correlation between a viewer's sense of community as a fan of a particular television program and the social media they consume, specifically during live airings of shows.

It is posited that viewers who closely follow their favorite programs on social media will feel a stronger sense of community with said programs, as well as other fans, than viewers who don't follow shows on social media at all.

RQ3: Does a person's propensity for general social media use indicate a greater propensity for social TV participation?

H3: There will be a positive correlation between one's use of social media for general purposes and their participation in social TV.

It is posited that those more active on social media in their day-to-day lives will also have a greater level of activity in conversations on social media regarding their favorite television programs.

Method

In researching social TV, several variables were selected for what would ultimately become our survey. These variables included individuals' social media usage, television-viewing habits, social TV participation, excitement level for television, and sense of community for specific programs.

In order to measure these variables, a survey was sent out via Survey Monkey. This survey was sent by way of email to a total of 300 potential respondents, with the hope that ten percent would respond, leaving us with a sample size of $N=30$. The survey was sent out to current undergraduate- and graduate-level students, a broad demographic composed of both heavy and light social media users. The hope in this was to receive a mix of results unbiased toward either group. The result in this endeavor was greater than expected, and the final sample size was $N=50$.

The survey consisted of questions asking respondents their habits on various media forms, such as television and social media. It also asked of respondents the level of excitement they feel for new episodes of their favorite television programs, as well as their personal feeling of community they get as being part of their favorite shows' fanbases. To code the research, each question on the survey was measured and valued on a 1 to 5 scale, with only a couple of exceptions where it was deemed that a scale of less than 5 was necessary.

To gauge respondents' social media usage, they were asked to provide how frequently they check social media, with 1 being not at all, 2 being weekly, 3 being every other day, 4 being daily, and 5 being multiple times per day. This variable is referred to in figures as 'SM Checking.' Respondents were also asked to provide how often they write their own posts on

social media, which had the same coding as the previous question. This variable is referred to as ‘SM Writing.’

To gauge television-viewing habits, respondents were asked to provide how much television they watch daily, with 1 being less than 1 hour, 2 being anywhere between 1 and 3 hours, 3 being anywhere between 3 and 5 hours, and 4 being anywhere between 5 and 8 hours. This variable was deemed irrelevant to the research data, questions, and hypotheses, and was therefore removed from the data after the administration of the survey.

To gauge social TV participation, respondents were asked whether they participate in social TV at all, with 1 being no; 2 being yes, but not during live airing; and 3 being yes, during live airings. This is referred to as ‘Social TV Participation.’ They were then asked how often they participate, with 1 being not applicable, 2 being one or two episodes per season of a television show, 3 being every few episodes, 4 being every other episode, and 5 being every episode. This is referred to as ‘Social TV Frequency.’

To gauge the excitement level of respondents, they were asked how excited they believe they get for their favorite television shows, with 1 being not excited at all, 2 being not very excited, 3 being somewhat excited, 4 being excited, and 5 being very excited. This is referred to simply as ‘Excitement.’

Finally, to gauge the sense of community respondents feel as fans of their favorite television programs, they were asked if they feel as part of a community, with 1 being not applicable, 2 being no, 3 being a marginal sense of community, 4 being a good sense of community, and 5 being a great sense of community. This is referred to simply as ‘Community.’

Once all of the data was collected, it was inserted into a Microsoft Excel document, which was then inserted into an IBM SPSS document and analyzed. A combination of Pearson correlation tests were conducted to determine if there is a statistical significance between one's social media usage and their social TV participation. Pearson correlation tests were also conducted to determine the statistical significance of one's social TV participation and excitement level, as well as their social TV participation and sense of community. All tests were run at a 95% margin of error.

Results

Before the Pearson correlation tests were conducted, the reliability of the two social TV variables, social TV participation and social TV frequency, was calculated in an effort to ensure that both measures were consistent with each other, since both variables measure the same thing. Using Cronbach's alpha, the reliability came out to .896, indicating high reliability. This can be seen in Figure 1.

Reliability Statistics	
Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.896	2

Fig. 1

The mean of each relevant variable was also determined. These can be found in Figure 2. Social media checking came out to $M=4.24$, indicating that the average respondent checks his or her social media page at least daily. Social media writing, on the other hand, averaged out at $M=2.06$, indicating that people write posts less often, yet still do. With social TV participation and frequency both around $M=1.2$, few respondents claimed to engage in social TV. Finally, excitement level ended up at $M=3.78$, and sense of community at $M=2.98$, indicating a moderate

excitement level for the average respondent, and a somewhat moderate – if lesser so – sense of community.

Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
SM Checking	50	1	5	4.24	.938
SM Writing	50	1	4	2.06	1.038
Social TV Participation	50	1	3	1.28	.573
Social TV Frequency	50	1	3	1.20	.535
Excitement	50	1	5	3.78	.975
Community	50	1	5	2.98	1.040
Valid N (listwise)	50				

Fig. 2

Once the means were calculated, we moved on to the Pearson correlation tests. First, we conducted a correlation test to determine the statistical significance between social media checking and social TV participation. In this test, the Pearson correlation came out to $r=.290$, indicating an ultimately weak relationship between the two. Despite that, the sig. 2-tailed score was $p=.041$, indicating statistical significance between the two, showing that an increase in one means there will be an increase in the other. A correlation was also conducted to determine if there was significance between social media writing and social TV participation. For this test, the Pearson score was $r=.486$, and the sig. 2-tailed score was $p=.000$. With these numbers, H3 was supported, indicating statistical significance between one’s social media writing and their social TV participation. As someone is more likely to regularly write posts on social media, they become more likely to participate in social TV. These values can be seen in Figure 3.

Correlations

		SM Writing	Social TV Participation
SM Writing	Pearson Correlation	1	.486**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000

	N	50	50
Social TV Participation	Pearson Correlation	.486**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	50	50

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Fig. 3

Next, a correlation was conducted for the variables social TV frequency and excitement level. In this test, the Pearson score was $r=-.031$, strangely indicating a weak negative relationship between one’s social TV frequency and their excitement level for television. The sig. 2-tailed score was $p=.829$, indicating a lack of statistical significance. Due to these scores, H1 was not supported. This can be seen in Figure 4.

Correlations

		Social TV Frequency	Excitement
Social TV Frequency	Pearson Correlation	1	-.031
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.829
	N	50	50
Excitement	Pearson Correlation	-.031	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.829	
	N	50	50

Fig. 4

Finally, to determine the significance of the relationship between social TV frequency and a viewer’s sense of community, one last correlation test was conducted. The results of this test were more positive, but only slightly so. The Pearson value ended up at $r=.112$, indicating a weak positive relationship between the variables. The sig. 2-tailed value for this test was $p=.437$, indicating yet again a lack of statistical significance. Because of this, H2 was not supported. This can be seen in Figure 5.

Correlations

		Social TV Participation	Community
Social TV Participation	Pearson Correlation	1	.112
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.437
	N	50	50
Community	Pearson Correlation	.112	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.437	
	N	50	50

Fig. 5

Conclusion

While social TV is a widely researched topic in the modern communication research landscape, and while many researchers have had positive findings, our research failed to discover any positive correlation between social TV and both a viewer's level of excitement and sense of community that they feel for their favorite television programs. There was a positive correlation between a person's social media usage and their propensity for social TV participation, which indicates that one who is more likely to use social media in day-to-day life is also more likely to use social media when they watch television. Despite that, this research failed to tell us if anybody gains more enjoyment out of television that can be directly related to their participation in social TV.

There are some things that could be pointed out as strange regarding this paper's research. Namely, the survey results regarding social TV were oddly negative, insofar as it resulted in a negative relationship between social TV and excitement level. While it was a weak relationship, this can indicate one of two things in regards to this research. It likely means that the group of respondents we received was not a strong enough sample to reach a healthy pool of social TV users, resulting in ultimately biased results. More interestingly, though, it could

indicate that viewers who engage in social TV unknowingly hurt their overall enjoyment of a program. Either way, future research should address this by making sure a larger sample is obtained.

Future research of this topic will remain important as social media continues to grow. The presence of concepts such as Story Sync, which AMC uses to foster conversation online about their show, *The Walking Dead*, shows that producers, creators, and even networks are interested in driving interest in their content via social TV. As such, future research should look at not only social media, but dedicated social TV applications such as Story Sync as well. This is a notable gap in this paper's current research, and the ideas in this paper would benefit from such expanded research.

Social TV is a unique phenomenon in the worlds of both television and social media, and with the right applications, it can benefit both forms of media. While its ability to engage viewers is still up for debate, there's no denying that social TV can change the way people watch television. The right applications just have to be found first.

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