

Social TV is a natural progression of traditional TV:

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1. OVERVIEW

Social TV is more likely to succeed where it takes an incremental approach, extending and enhancing existing 'lean-back' experience of television, rather than an approach that introduces more active paradigms of interaction. Traditional broadcast television is already interactive, and it is already social. It is an evolved, sophisticated proposition, providing an avenue for passive participation in society. The main differentiators of traditional television from newer interactive varieties are the passive nature of the audience and the lack of time-shifting capabilities. In my view, Social TV propositions that maintain these attributes of traditional TV will be more likely to succeed in the near term.

2. LEAN-BACK IS ESSENTIAL TO TV

There is a thread within interactive TV (iTV) literature reflecting the position that iTV will cause the TV viewing experience to evolve from "lean back" to "lean forward", as a function of the "convergence" of digital information and communication technologies. For example, Swedlow writes that "television is now becoming an on-demand, participatory, non-linear, infotainment, advertising targeted, broadband, two-way communications platform" [15 p. 1]. Lu writes: "As viewers become accustomed to the "lean forward" (active) model of viewing instead of the traditional "lean back" (passive) model, as well as to the habit of processing more information simultaneously (e.g., using computers or mobile devices while watching television), they are beginning to gain and demand more control over their viewing experiences than ever before ." [8 p. 2]. These views seem to reflect a predisposition to the new technologies, and perhaps a lack of appreciation for the evolved sophistication of traditional TV.

Traditional television is interactive: viewers can change channels (and also respond to programs in non-technical ways, such as by singing along). Since its introduction, the medium of TV has evolved into a multi-channel platform allowing viewers to switch between themed channels – many of which replay programs several times in a day – to view what they want when they want it. Traditional television allows users to be passively engaged. They can sing along with or talk back to a presenter. They can be surprised while retaining control. They can have new experiences without being threatened. They can be taken out of their own lives ...while leaning back.

The current state of the medium, reflecting 50 years of evolution driven by consumer demand, can be taken as an indicator that

"lean-back" is an essential part of what audiences seek in the TV experience.

3. TRADITIONAL TV IS SOCIAL

Traditional television is social. Research into media uses and gratifications has found that people use traditional broadcast media for companionship [3,11], Social Interaction [11], and Social Utility [14]. Livaditi, Vassilopoulou et al. include the need for social Integration, summarizing the category as a need to "gain a sense of belonging" [7 p. 2] Lee and Lee [6] refer to the pleasure in talking about a shared television experience with others as "social grease" There is also a body of literature [e.g., 2, 12] showing audience members can develop a parasocial relationship with media characters when she or he is, or feels, addressed by a media character or persona.

4. TRADITIONAL TV IS SHARED IN TIME

Traditional broadcast TV began as a live medium and the linear, one-way (non-time-shifted) chronological delivery of content remains a distinguishing characteristic from newer technologies. Scannell [13] has described how broadcast media, in expressing the ongoing narrative of society, allows users to be present – if not to participate – in the making of social history. The degree of social richness afforded by traditional television is limited primarily by lack of capacity for feedback or personalisation; nevertheless, traditional television becomes a shared, distributed, social experience it is viewed 'Live'. The added value of live broadcast is evidenced by the ticket prices paid to watch "simulcast" sports and artistic events. A component of the value of "Live" broadcast may be the value of receiving the information at the earliest possible time, (a sports fan, for example, may be impatient to learn the outcome); but examples such as the live broadcast of opera performances, in which the progress and outcome are well known, suggest that the value is in the shared social experience. Further evidence of the qualitative difference and added value of live over recorded television is the Catholic church doctrine that forgiveness of sins is granted to people present in St. Peter's to receive the Papal Blessing *and* to those watching the ceremony live on television, but *not* to those watching to delayed or recorded broadcasts [10].

5. SOCIAL TV SHOULD NOT BE DISRUPTIVE

For Social TV to be sustainably successful, we assume applications should align, or at least not conflict, with viewers' established motivations for watching TV (and if possible extend them). It is possible, of course that Social TV research might produce 'disruptive' innovations, changing the way people use their televisions, but the more conservative assumption is that social TV applications will enhance, rather than transform, the television experience – at least in the near term. Social TV applications will be more likely to succeed if they allow passive audience engagement, and leverage existing TV interaction paradigms.

Research into systems that enhance the shared aspects for the television experience show promising directions [e.g., 1; 4; 5; 9]. I look forward to research into systems that will show how many of 'people like me' are simultaneously watching a program at any given time, whether I define myself by location, profession, gender, age, interest, etc.

6. REFERENCES

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