

Title: The Promise and Perils of Social TV: *The Voice (USA)*

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Abstract

In popular discourse on social TV, Twitter is heralded as the natural companion to television. In this presentation, I want to problematize this claim by interrogating the use of Twitter in the live shows of the popular reality-TV competition *The Voice (USA)* over the course of its first five seasons. I trace how the role of tweets/Twitter has changed and reflect on the implications hereof in the relationship between producers and viewers, and viewers amongst each other. Doing so reveals an interesting tension between the potential uses of Twitter for its viewers, and the ambitions of television producers. More specifically, I claim that over the course of these seasons there are two identifiable trends pertaining to social media use in, or by, the show: (1) it decentralized social media usage by gradually directing participation to online platforms rather than to integrate it in the on-air episodes and (2) it made user participation increasingly *reactive*, encouraging accumulative voting, rather than *interactive*, by highlighting individual comments, having the hosts and/or contestants respond to them on-air. Both observations are based on qualitative and quantitative considerations of the episodes over time. To make the first trend explicit I consider how the program employs social media, identifying the different relationships between social media and television through a taxonomy provided by Van Es and Müller (2012). Subsequently, I reveal the second trend with the help of a classification developed by Sara Gunn Enli (2013) to examine the degree of viewer influence over the on-air production.

My analysis of *The Voice* demonstrates how the producers of the show have found a clever way to take advantage of the medium-specific qualities of Twitter in order to transform the viewers at home into spokesmen for the show. Ironically, they are able to do so whilst limiting the actual influence these viewers have over what unfolds on-screen. The two identified trends taken together will stimulate a reflection on the promise and perils of social TV. I will propose that social TV is hardly a new phenomenon since concepts like participation, liveness and event TV are all part of social TV, and they all in their unique ways have been employed to help reproduce ‘value’ for programs (Couldry 2003) – as has been done in past television formats.

Title: Adapting – to the individual, to the industry, to information. Algorithmic thinking and audience prediction within Swedish Public Service

Bio: Jonas Andersson Schwarz is a Post-Doc Researcher in collaboration with Sweden's biggest advertising agency Forsman & Bodenfors, Södertörn University, Stockholm, Sweden (jonas.andersson.schwarz@sh.se).

Abstract

Given the increasing reliance on audiovisual streaming over internet protocols—integrated with platforms for digital sharing—a number of potentials and challenges for media companies have begun to emerge. Audiences can be surveyed in much finer detail, in real time; audience behavior becomes premised on timeshifting, and a pick-and-mix, pull-based mode of discovery. Potentially, this makes audience behaviors even more fragmented. Simultaneously, they become possible to track and even predict, by recursion to algorithmic modes of audience management (pattern recognition of “sociograms,” purely aleatory correlations).

How should PSB actors respond to a surrounding media landscape that is increasingly beset by these “panspectric” (i.e. data-driven, surveillant, cybernetic) modes of audience prediction and audience maximization? While the importance of on-demand services (e.g. BBC iPlayer, SVT Play) grows rapidly, pressure is also increasing as a result of providers such as Netflix and Spotify attracting large audiences. Login-based access to the PSB's own on-demand services has begun to materialize, making individualized, all encompassing tracking even more feasible. This is important for debates on the future of PSB licensing.

In interview-based fieldwork, I have examined the current attitudes and world-views of Swedish PSB representatives (mainly, line managers) regarding audience tracking and measurement, audience prediction, crowdsourced intelligence, and corporate planning. I have previously explored prototypical services, employed by PSB actors that experiment with panspectric elements (Andersson Schwarz & Palmås, 2013). My current fieldwork continues to show that different departments within the PSB corporations tend to have divergent attitudes on this form of media management.

The paper will address (1) internal organizational divergence, routinely manifested in a tension between latent paternalism and panspectrocism; (2) current tendencies to adopt a “panspectric mindset”—instances when human (manual) information-gathering in social media environments mimics the surveillant practices and cybernetic impulse found within

algorithmic corporate intelligence; and (3) the consequences regarding the nature of media content as one of “social objects,” accentuating likeability (suggesting that the act of consumption be publicly flaunted) and shareability (in short, a “viral” capacity).

I conclude that PSB has an exceptional position in that it is guided by an entirely different remit than commercial actors, and hence does not need to “maximize” audiences in the same way—especially so in those Scandinavian PSB systems that do not rely on advertising.

Title: “Social TV: How TV News Programs Are Adapting to the Second Screen?”

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Abstract

Television is much more than what is reproduced in household appliances. Today, television is crossed by Internet and its multiple tools (blogs, social media, chats, websites, forums), forming a nearly indivisible union in which one cannot go without the other. Social media users realize this relationship by using them to inform about TV contents, have access to the news before its diffusion in mainstream media, engage in discussions, or even make jokes out of it, and for the exchange of information with users. The purpose of this paper is to investigate the extent to which television news programs explore the potentialities of social media for promoting participation and interaction among their audiences. It is assumed that the use of interactive resources in social networks by TV news programs increase participation among their followers, be it through comments, share or “likes”, but it seems that not much emphasis has been put into the new forms of bringing television together with social networks. We carry out an interdisciplinary and comparative analysis in order to establish the differences and similarities between audiovisual and social media discourse. We analyze daily posts on Facebook and tweets of two TV news broadcasts in Brazil and Spain during a 5-week period. Simultaneously, we reproduce the play lists of prime time TV news in both countries and then compare what news topics broadcasted are published in their social profiles with those which are not, as well as determining which topics generates a higher level of interaction. For both countries, results indicate that (a) television news broadcasts are not using social networks effectively to invite their audience to engage in their contents, (b) the topics selected for social media posts are likely to be the headlines in the TV news analyzed, and that (c) public news broadcasts are more likely to publish political topics than private broadcasts in both countries.

Title: Everyone's Watching It: The Role of Hype in Television Engagement through Social Media

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Abstract

Social media is playing an ever-increasing role in both viewers engagement with television and in the television industries evaluation of programming, in Australia – which is the focus of our study - and beyond. Twitter hashtags and viewer comments are increasingly incorporated into broadcasts, while Facebook fan pages provide a means of marketing upcoming shows and television personalities directly into the social media feed of millions of users. Additionally, bespoke applications such as FanGo and ZeeBox, which interact with the mainstream social networks, are increasingly being utilized by broadcasters for interactive elements of programming (c.f. Harrington, Highfield and Bruns, 2012).

However, both the academic and industry study of these platforms has focused on the measure of content during the specific broadcast of the show, or a period surrounding it (e.g. 3 hours before until 3 am the next day, in the case of 2013 Nielsen SocialGuide reports). In this paper, we argue that this focus ignores a significant period for both television producers and advertisers; the lead-up to the program. If, as we argue elsewhere (Bruns, Woodford, Highfield & Prowd, forthcoming), users are persuaded to engage with content both by advertising of the Twitter hash-tag or Facebook page and by observing their network connections engaging with such content, the period before and between shows may have a significant impact on a viewers likelihood to watch a show.

The significance of this period for broadcasters is highlighted by the efforts they afford to advertising forthcoming shows through several channels, including television and social media, but also more widely. Biltereyst (2004, p.123) has argued that reality television generates controversy to receive media attention, and our previous small-scale work on reality shows during 2013 and 2014 supports the theory that promoting controversial behavior is likely to lead to increased viewing (Woodford & Prowd, 2014a). It remains unclear, however,

to what extent this applies to other television genres. Similarly, while networks use of social media has been increasing, best practices remain unclear. Thus, by applying our telemetrics, that is social media metrics for television based on sabermetric approaches (Woodford, Prowd & Bruns, forthcoming; c.f. Woodford & Prowd, 2014b), to the period between shows, we are able to better understand the period when key viewing decisions may be made, to establish the significance of observing discussions within your network during the period between shows, and identify best practice examples of promoting a show using social media.

Title: Merely facilitating or actively stimulating diverse media choices? – Public service media at the cross-road

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Abstract

Can it still be the task of public service media to add to the digital abundance, and offer types of content that are almost certainly available elsewhere – providing users are able to find them? Or must the public mission shift from providing diverse supply, to stimulating and enabling users to benefit from the diversity of media content offered, within the repertoire of the public service media, or even elsewhere?

Common to the recent trends in media technology, such as smart TVs, second screen viewing, connected TV, search, personalized targeting and social recommendations is that they put the media-audience interaction central, allowing for a far more differentiated and intensified interaction between the media and the user. The result is a growing orientation towards the user, her social context, her information needs and media consumption habits. The technological advances also provide the media with the means to approach the question of what kinds of contents users are exposed to far more pro-actively. Interactivity, personalization and tracking of user preferences, but also the possibilities of targeting individual users open up new opportunities to guide or even ‘nudge’ the audience towards more diverse consumption, thereby also actively countering fears about ‘filter bubbles’ and selective exposure. Public service media today are at a cross-road at which to decide of how personal, persuasive and responsive their relationship to the audience should be, and what safeguards are needed to preserve autonomy, privacy and the public sphere.

This paper will conceptualize the possible roles of public service media in adopting a more pro-active approach towards diverse exposure and reflect on the normative and ethical benchmarks to consider. After a brief discussion of exposure diversity as a policy goal, and the role that the public service media have played so far, the paper will explore how public service media already is or could contribute even more to pro-actively exposing the audience to more diverse content. It will then offer some reflections on the possible ethical and normative implications, inspired by a growing body of literature about the ethics of persuasion.

The paper will not only advance the academic debate but also provide timely input to a number of influential consultations at the national and European policy level that highlight concerns about information abundance, attention scarcity, new gatekeepers but also new forms of commercial and public surveillance as well as unprecedented possibilities of filtering and steering users media consumption.