

Social Media Brings New Engagement To TV

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Live-tweeting supports live viewing

Social media is bringing dramatic changes to nearly every aspect of the TV business. Viewers are using Facebook and Twitter to comment about shows before, during and after they air.

Television networks, grappling with the fragmentation of their audience, are experimenting with mobile apps, Twitter promotions and branded social networks in an effort to bring viewers back together. And a variety of other stakeholders are getting in on the social action as well.

“Experimentation still rules the day,” said Debra Aho Williamson, eMarketer principal analyst and author of the new report, “Socializing the TV Experience.” “There is a great deal of uncertainty about the paths that social media and TV will take and the extent to which they will converge over time.”

The many players involved are chasing a small but growing user base. While 43% of online adults have gone online or used social media to engage with TV programming in some way, according to 24/7 Wall St. and Harris Poll, only 17% said they do it while they are watching TV.

But the youngest respondents in the 24/7 and Harris survey—those ages 18 to 34—were significantly more likely than older respondents to have made the social/TV connection. And TV-related properties have become popular in social media. Just as consumers have shown their support by “liking” brand pages on Facebook and following companies on Twitter, they have turned to social media to share their TV-viewing experience.

When it comes to socializing TV in real time, Twitter has emerged as the leader. TV networks have begun to insert hashtags on-screen in an effort to bring real-time conversations together under a common banner, and encouraging actors and other talent to live-tweet to boost engagement.

When “Survivor” host Jeff Probst, for example, began live-tweeting during episodes of the reality program during the spring 2011 season, thousands of viewers followed his lead.

“Given the amount of activity surrounding social media and TV, some level of convergence is inevitable,” said Williamson. “But trends like timeshifting pose a potential obstacle—there’s not much pleasure in sharing your thoughts about a show when you’re watching it after it first aired. For the networks, social media may be one of the last best ways to bring viewers back together again.”

The full report, “Socializing the TV Experience” also answers these key questions:
 How do viewers use social media to enhance their TV experience?

How do timeshifting and on-demand viewing impact TV/social media integration?

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What do TV networks gain from using Twitter and Facebook?

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What role do mobile apps play in the ecosystem?

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Can social buzz help TV networks’ ad sales?

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Will all TV eventually be social?

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