Chapter 3.5
Examining the Roles of Mobility in Social TV

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ABSTRACT

Mobile TVs have been available for many years, without ever becoming very popular. Moreover, the first wave of research has been mostly concerned with technology and standards, which are necessary to ensure interoperability and market acceptance. Although, there has been a significant body of computer supported co-operative work (CSCW) and mobile human-computer interaction (HCI) research findings, there is limited investigation in the context of leisure activities, such as TV. In this chapter, the author proposes three concepts that drive the main paths for research and practice in mobile and social TV: (1) Mobile TV as a content format, (2) Mobile TV as user behavior and (3) Mobile TV as interaction terminal. Further research should elaborate on these three concepts and highlight the cultural impact of mobile TV.

INTRODUCTION

One explanation for the slow diffusion of interactive TV (ITV) in the information society is that the difference between the broadcast and the telecommunications mentality has imposed an artificial distinction between content distribution and interpersonal communication. As a result, content has to be distributed and consumed through broadband, unidirectional and inflexible TV channels and interpersonal communication takes place over low-bandwidth bidirectional channels. However, the convergence of the telecommunication and content distribution platforms could be beneficial for viewers, as well as the commercial TV stakeholders. In addition, new devices and new types of content facilitate the emergence of novel consumer behaviors. In this article, we explore the interplay of these three concepts (device, content, behavior) in the context of mobile and social TV

TV content gradually finds its way through Internet and mobile platforms. Besides triple-play services, which offer integrated access to voice, content and data services, there are opportunities for new services enabled by the mobile infrastructure. Indeed, the convergence of broadcast, mobile and data platforms has offered many opportunities for integrated content and communication services, which we refer to as 'Social TV'. We define social TV as a socio-technical system that involves more than one user and networked audiovisual devices.

Previous definitions were focused only on the technological aspects and ignored the fact that even traditional TV is inherently social. For example, viewers compete mentally with quiz show participants, or between co-located groups. Moreover, viewers react emotionally to TV content, they record and share TV content with friends and discuss about shows either in real-time, or afterwards. In this context, it is necessary to not only pay attention to usability issues, but also to sociability. Indeed, ethnographic and survey studies have documented the social uses of TV (Duchenaut et al 2008, Lee and Lee 1995), but they have not described the user requirements of applications that facilitate the social uses of TV. For this purpose, we explore the related academic literature, we identify the user interface requirements of those computer mediated communication applications that enhance the social dimension of TV.

The rest of the article is structured as follows. We begin with an analysis of the social uses of mobile TV. In Section 3, we outline the multiple roles of mobility in Social TV. Finally, we describe the implication of such systems for practice and future research.

SOCIAL AND TECHNOLOGICAL ASPECTS OF MOBILE TV

This section explores the social and technological dimensions of TV and other related audiovisual media. In addition, we present a brief overview of technological support for TV sociability.

Social Value of TV

Although TV has been blamed for the reduction of social interaction within the family and the local community, there is a significant body of previous research that considers TV as a social medium, because it provides opportunities for shared experiences and group viewing. In particular, mobile phone applications that support sociability within families or distant groups might enhance the attractiveness of ITV as a leisure activity. This section draws on interdisciplinary literature and empirical research in order to raise the main research issues of the multiple roles of mobility within Social TV.

Despite the many criticisms on the quality of TV content and on the passive nature of the watching activity, the social uses of TV have been documented in acclaimed research (Gauntlett and Hill 1999, Kubey and Csikszentmihalyi 1990). It has also been established that viewers have adapted TV in many ways to meet their everyday life needs (Lee and Lee 1995, Rubin 1983). The findings of these works frame a set of opportunities for the design of social communication services in mobile TV.

The majority of previous research on ITV has over-emphasized the benefit of increased choice of content and of the interactivity with content. Instead, a worthwhile effort would be the fulfillment of seamless communication over, or about televised content. Such services could support human connectedness (Agamanolis 2006) over a distance (e.g. synchronous communication over a TV program between diasporic households), or enhancement of the shared experience that comes

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