

MULTISCREENING AND SOCIAL TV

THE CHANGING LANDSCAPE OF TV CONSUMPTION IN ITALY

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Abstract: The explosive growth of handheld screen devices has fostered the emergence of new TV consumption practices: "always connected while watching TV" is the expression that best summarizes this transformation. On the one hand, we observe multiscreening practices engendered by the availability of second screen devices, which people use both simultaneously and sequentially while watching. On the other hand, these handheld devices are strengthening the social dimension of the TV-watching experience (Social TV).

This paper aims to analyze the diffusion of social and connected television in the Italian market, relying on data from the "Osservatorio Social TV 2013-2014" (Sapienza University, Rome).

Keywords: Social TV, audience, multiscreening, engagement, social media, Twitter

In the last five years, the hybridization of TV and the Internet (broadcast + broadband) and wide diffusion of personal (touch) screen devices (Smartphone, tablet) have deeply changed the experience of watching audiovisual (TV) content. Labels like "post-network era,"¹ "post-broadcast era,"² "matrix medium"³ or "new television"⁴ proclaim the end of (the traditional form of) television and anticipate multiple transformations leading to a new era, namely "the phase that comes after TV."⁵

1 A. Lotz, *The Television Will Be Revolutionized*, New York University Press, 2007

2 G. Turner, J. Tay, eds., (2009), *Television Studies After Tv. Understanding Television in the Post-Broadcast Era*, Routledge, 2009

3 M. Curtin, "Matrix media," in: G. Turner, J. Tay, eds. (2009), *Television Studies After Tv. Understanding Television in the Post-Broadcast Era*, Routledge, 2009, p. 9–19

4 A. Moran, *New Flows in Global TV*, Intellect Ltd., 2009

5 L. Spigel, J. Olsson, *Television After TV: Essays on a Medium in Transition*, Duke University Press, 2004, p. 2

On the one hand, we are now observing the development of the so-called “connected television,” which is neither a specific device (Smart TV, Internet TV) nor a technological standard: it is rather a broader pattern, a sort of evolutionary trend carried on by a plurality of players including broadcasters, micro-electronics companies (Samsung, Sony), digital enterprises (Google, Apple, Microsoft) and Over The Top services (Netflix, Hulu). Television content has become independent of both the medium – the distribution platform by which it is delivered – and the display devices, thus giving shape to a new TV experience.⁶

On the other hand, the explosive growth of handheld screen devices has fostered the emergence of new consumption practices strengthening the social dimension of the TV-watching experience (Social TV): socially engaged television audiences comment on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and WhatsApp; use TV channel mobile apps to vote, play and expand the experience of being engaged in the show; rapidly check, seek and share information on characters, brands and so on.⁷

This paper aims to analyze the main transformations affecting TV experience in Italy by taking into account both multiscreening and Social TV practices. We will rely on data from the “Osservatorio Social TV 2013–2014” (DigiLab Sapienza - University of Rome), related to the diffusion of social and connected television in the Italian market. The research team has conducted several surveys – according to the complementary approach⁸ - dedicated to new practices taken on by audiences, with particular attention to:

- Ethnographic research on family consumption, TV and everyday experience. Our sample includes 6 families with children (18 persons), 2 couples and 2 pairs of roommates (8 persons), and 3 single persons. All respondents are from Rome. The interviews were conducted from June to September 2013. Interviews have been realized in domestic environments, so as to allow the observation of daily practices, with particular attention paid to use of the TV-set, new devices and multi-platform content; use of ‘second screen’ and social media during TV consumption; level of cognitive, emotional and relational engagement, to be analyzed both with respect to types of devices used and contents shared.
- Focus group on Social TV practices. We held 4 focus groups (two with early teens; and two with people aged 20–35 and 30–55, respectively). The issues discussed were the same as in the ethnographic research, but the actual focus was on multiscreening, the use of social media during TV consumption, and broadcaster’s social strategies.
- Quantitative analysis (CAWI – Global Web Index⁹) of a sample of Internet users (708 age 16–64; 98 early teens, 12–16) to investigate multiscreening practices and social interaction.

1 How Multiscreening is Changing the TV Experience

If we consider the U.S. market, we can observe a scenario where second screen content, social networking, apps, cloud-based services and over-the-top (OTT) technologies have all evolved to provide content for a multiscreen ecosystem that is constantly reinventing itself, and audiences who are constantly growing. According to the Nielsen’s

6 R. Andò, A. Marinelli, ‘La televisione nei processi di convergenza. Sistemi tecnologici, audience e modelli di business della Connected Television,’ *Micro & MacroMarketing*, 1-2014, p. 31–54.

7 F. Giglietto F., D. Selva, ‘Second Screen and Participation: A Content Analysis on a Full Season Dataset of Tweets,’ *Journal of Communication*, 64 (2), 2014, p. 260–277; F. Giglietto, F. (2013), ‘Exploring Correlations Between TV Viewership and Twitter Conversations in Italian Political Talk Shows’, 2013, available at SSRN 2306512; R. Andò, F. Comunello, ‘Vieni via con me. Consumo televisivo, social media e civic engagement,’ *Sociologia della comunicazione*, 43, 2012, p. 89–104; C. Courtois, D. Schuurman, L. De Marez, ‘Triple Screen Viewing Practices: Diversification or Compartmentalization?’, *EuroTV’11*, June 29–July 1, 2011, Lisbon, Portugal; M. Doughty, D. Rowland, S. Lawson, ‘Co-Viewing Live TV with Digital Backchannel Streams,’ *EuroTV’11*, June 29–July 1, 2011, Lisbon, Portugal; D.Y. Wohn, E.K. Na, ‘Tweeting about TV: Sharing television viewing experiences via social media message streams’ *First Monday*, 16(3), 2011, available at: <http://firstmonday.org/htbin/cgiwrap/bin/ojs/index.php/fm/article/view/3368/2779>, last visited on December 1st, 2014.

8 K.B. Jensen, *The complementarity of qualitative and quantitative methodologies in media and communication research*, Routledge, 2002, p. 254–272.

9 For this study we re-contacted 750 respondents from the Global Web Index Core Survey, which has a sample of 1000 completes per wave which are representative of the Italian online population. Our sample (708 respondents) covered different age groups (16–24, 25–35, 35–44, 45–54, 55–64 years old). The survey was conducted in October 2014

Cross-Platform Report from March 2014, “for all that’s changing in our media fragmented reality, viewers continue to demand and consume quality content for entertainment, information and connection at the rate of close to 60 hours per week.”¹⁰

On the contrary, the spread of digital technology in Italy is highly discontinuous: in addition to a large penetration of smart screen devices (smartphone 45%, tablet 12%), we still observe a strong digital divide (a little less than 40% of the population does not have access to the Internet), a very low fixed broadband penetration (26%) and a significant delay in the diffusion of OTT services, due to the barrier of the English language in which audiovisual content is distributed all over the world.

This is the main reason why television audiences in Italy are divided into two main groups: 1) free-to-air digital TV consumers, much more numerous and considerably more traditional with respect to their consumption practices; 2) innovative audience – with a high level of digital skills, comparable to that of the U.S. or the UK – performing multiscreening and social TV practices, our research topic.

The research has focused on multiscreening practices engendered by the availability of second screen devices, which people use both simultaneously and sequentially while watching TV.

These practices can be considered as a kind of enhanced television experience; however, we have also evaluated the extent to which these new platforms for managing information and social networking can be used as distraction devices.

First of all, multiscreening practices have dramatically changed the user experience of TV consumption: the audience’s attention is now focused on different screens simultaneously. As results evident from the ethnographic research, even on collective viewing occasions, each member of the family continues to use his/her personal device independently.

“Always connected while watching TV” is the expression that best summarizes this transformation and clarifies the evolution with respect to the ideal model “with my family, watching TV”, described by James Lull in *Inside Family Viewing*.¹¹

This is evident in our interviewees’ statements:

Basically, I take the tablet and play with it while watching TV, or have a little chat on Facebook... You know, stuff like that. And my phone is always there, too. (Gennaro, 64 years old)

Before, I was always with laptop and TV, now I have laptop, smartphone and television. (Melania, 31 years old)

Therefore, multitasking on multiple screens has come to define the TV-watching experience; we are now facing ‘connected viewers’¹² who incorporate their mobile devices into their television-watching experiences. In the U.S., simultaneously while watching television 81% use a smartphone, 66% both smartphone and laptop/PC, and 66% laptop/PC.¹³

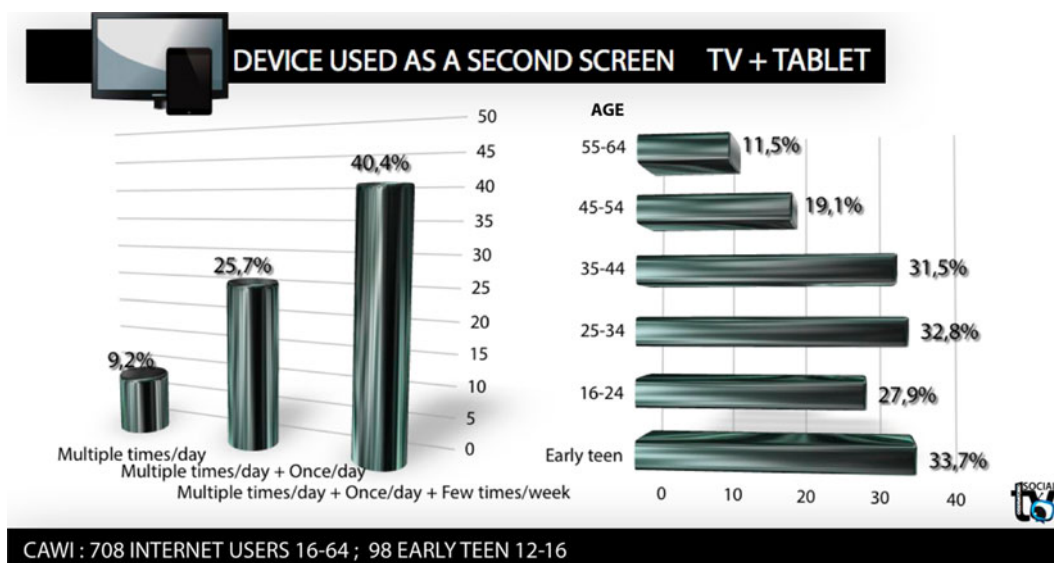
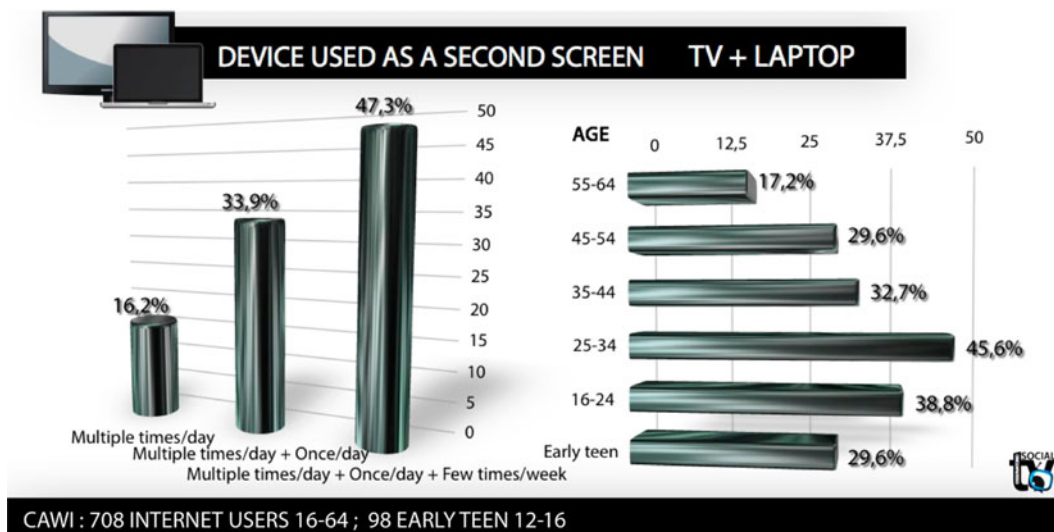
Simultaneous multiscreening is now also a daily habit in Italy for one third of our sample; the laptop, which has been the companion device in the first experimental phase, is replaced by the smartphone or the tablet. This trend is particularly evident in the early teens, who are below the average in simultaneous usage of TV and laptop (29.6%), especially when compared with the percentages reported by young adults (age 24–34), who maintain a link with the PC as an access device to the Internet and social networking sites (45.6% of simultaneous usage).

10 See <http://www.nielsen.com/content/dam/corporate/us/en/reports-downloads/2014%20Reports/nielsen-cross-platform-report-march-2014.pdf>, last visited on December 1st, 2014

11 J. Lull, *Inside family viewing*, 1990, Routledge

12 Aaron Smith and Jan Lauren Boyles, “The Rise of the ‘Connected Viewer,’ ” Pew Research Center’s Internet & American Life Project, July 17, 2012. Available at <http://www.pewinternet.org/Reports/2012/Connected-viewers.aspx>, last visited on December 1st, 2014

13 ComScore, State of the internet Q3, 2012



Among the various second screen devices, the smartphone appears as the most in tune with the simultaneous viewing of TV content and social TV practices. It carries out an enabling function because it is a personal, easy to use, intergenerational device. For young people, the smartphone already represents the technological device by which they manage communication flows and interpersonal relations in their everyday life.

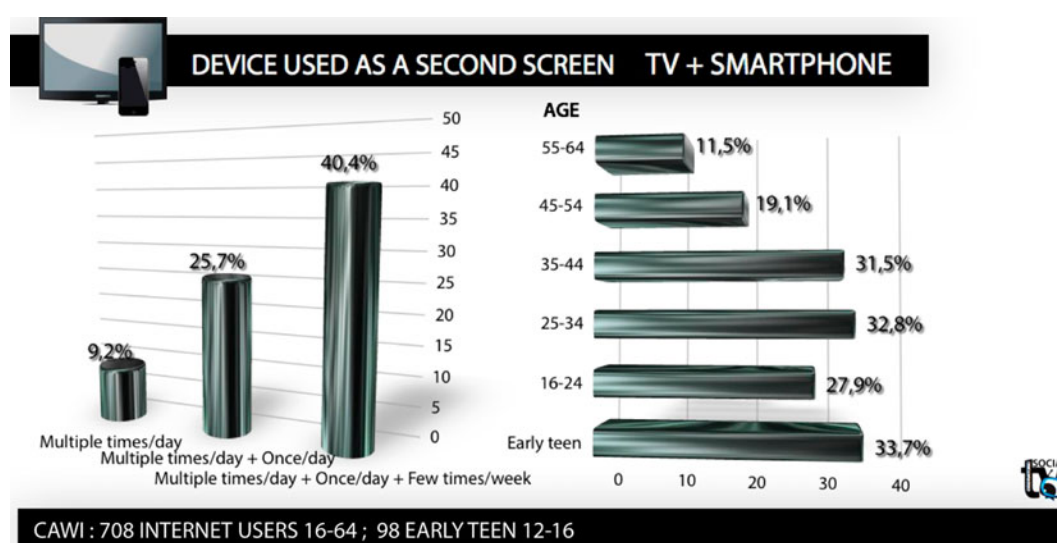
I use my cell phone when I watch TV. I keep it close by, just in case a friend needs something and I have to go and pick him up somewhere. I mean, things like that. I'm willing to do it, so I take the call. That's it... Just in these cases. Otherwise, I cut myself off from everything else. (Francesco, 18 years old)

Similarly it becomes the preferred companion device while watching TV and is used to manage online sharing, comments and chat.

As Lucia (16 years old) says:

When there is a reality show or another TV program, I always have [my smartphone] with me, so I can comment on Facebook about what is going on. That's what I mostly use it for. Also when I watch a movie, even if I'm interested, I just can't stay away from my phone. Someone might text me... I don't know, it's become a habit.

Early teens reach daily use percentages close to 50%; this level is stable up to 34 years and the involvement is also evident in more mature audiences.



Such an intense use of multiscreening certainly raises the problem of a potential shift with respect to the focus of attention among different screen devices. It is almost inevitable that in many situations the television screen remains in the background (as a second screen) while individual activities are centered on the smartphone (tablet, laptop), which becomes the first screen. According to a recent Facebook study, “during a commercial or show, the number one thing people do is check email: 82% did so during commercial breaks, and 70% did so during the TV show itself. [...] As multi-screening becomes the norm, marketers can turn what could be perceived as a distraction into an integrated and enhanced brand experience that extends from TV across multiple device screens.”¹⁴

This potential shift is reported by 40% of the CAWI sample respondents and also emerges in the focus group with early teens:

Once I sat in front of the TV to fixate on it, but now I'm more attached to the phone!
(Rachele, age 14)

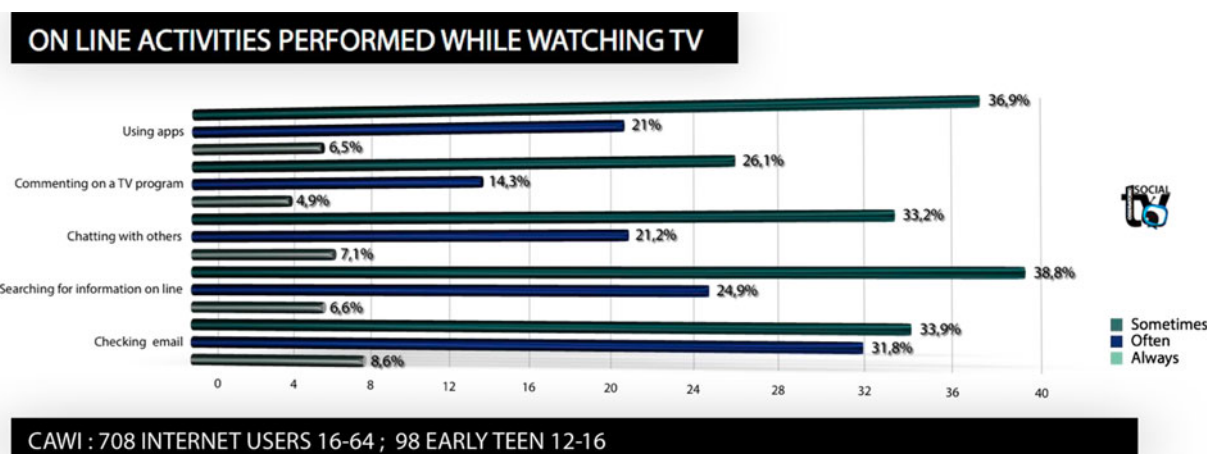
We chat and then watch [TV]. (Simone, 13 years old)

Always on, the TV screen therefore confirms its role as a transitional object,¹⁵ something that gives us a sense of personal identity and ensures the continuity of such identity in everyday life. It remains a domestic routine carried on while communicating with others and watching TV (and web) content on different screen devices.

14 See: <https://www.facebook.com/business/news/From-One-screen-to-Five-The-New-Way-We-Watch-TV>, last visited on December 1st, 2014

15 R. Silverstone, 'Television, ontological security and the transitional object', *Media, Culture & Society*, 15, 1993, p. 573–598

Watching TV is an activity traditionally compatible with other household activities. As the second screen is always connected to the Internet, some activities of the ordinary 'digital life' compete for the audience's attention: check email, search for information, manage social networking sites, send messages, use apps.



Through the second screen device you can also talk about what you are watching on TV, share emotions, involve friends in the on-air show or the next TV series. The risk of distraction is avoided if the TV show is able to involve, to tell stories, to stimulate the need to know. When the TV is able to do this, multiscreening becomes an opportunity to increase engagement, enabling the audiences to cooperate in the construction of an expanded television text¹⁶ that is the result of a collective work of interpretation.

2 Exploring Social TV Practices

Multiscreening is crucial to defining a new TV consumption model, allowing the rise of the social TV phenomenon. Social TV refers to a set of online practices experienced by connected audiences to fulfill their need and desire for participation and interaction with TV content.¹⁷

If we were to define it, we could say that social TV has to do with relations (it is indeed a matter of relations): the relationship between audience members who share a common interest and passion for a specific TV content, and between audience and TV content. Even more specifically, social TV has to do with the way people stay in touch with each other: the reference here is to all kinds of interaction generated by audiences with respect to used devices (tablet, smartphone, laptop), inhabited online environments (social media and apps), live/non-live interaction flows, before-during-after program conversations, TV genres and motivations to interact (such as sharing, support for the program, looking for rewards).

Social TV also implies a digital relationship with the content, namely all the interaction – managed across a second screen – oriented to information gathering and sharing about television content, with reference to different programs, celebrities (TV show hosts, actors), content, brands and commercials, gamification.¹⁸ Social TV practices, therefore,

16 I. D. Askwith, *Television 2.0: Reconceptualizing TV as an engagement medium*, Doctoral dissertation, Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2007

17 Giglietto, Selva, 2014; Andò, Comunello 2012; Courtois, Schuurman, De Marez 2011; Doughty, Rowland, Lawson, 2011; Wohn, Na 2011; for an overview of Social TV definitions, see: G. Harboe, 'In search of social television,' *Social interactive television: Immersive shared experiences and perspectives*, Hershey, Pa.: Information Science Reference, 2009, p. 1–13

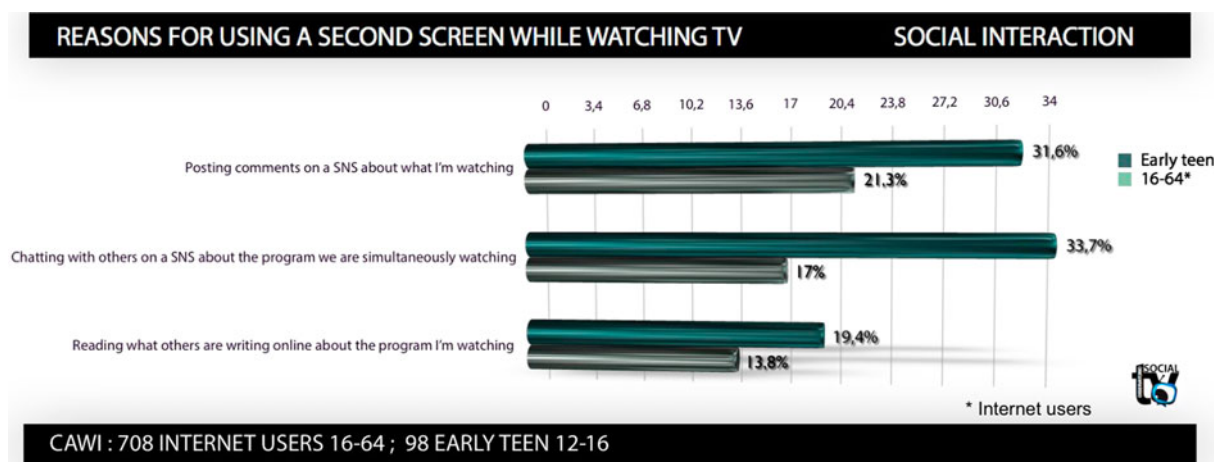
18 R. Andò (2014) 'What does TV actually mean? New consumer experience and generations' in: Special Section 'Generations as (media) audiences, Participations,' *Journal of Audience and Reception Studies*, forthcoming 2014; Andò, Marinelli, 2014

satisfy the audience's need to express their interest in TV content, share the meanings produced through consumption, interact with the shows and facilitate backchannel contacts with TV celebrities. Hence, we are facing audiences who have definitively got out of their couch potatoes condition to become active and socially engaged, integrating the features of participatory culture¹⁹ into their television consumption patterns.

The most important dimension of Social TV, both from a quantitative and qualitative standpoint, is certainly the social interaction. On the one side, TV content continues to be central to everyday life, acting as a common heritage for people and providing continuous opportunities for relationship and aggregation. On the other, as documented by fandom and audience studies,²⁰ the pleasure of television consumption traditionally lies in the possibility to share meanings and emotions with others.

Well, I write something on the official Facebook page, use my smartphone or chat with friends. We comment on the show and ask each other: "What do you think?" (Valentina, 17 years old).

The two most popular activities among audiences who use connected mobile devices while watching TV are: posting comments on social networking sites about what they are watching on TV (21% of adult Internet users vs. 31.6% of early teens), and using social media to interact with others watching the same TV program (33.7% of early teens, which is nearly double the proportion – 17% – of adult Internet users who do the same). However, the habit of using social networking sites while watching TV and the awareness of being in touch with other audience members also allow TV viewers to check what others say about the program and verify their own perception of it.



The second motivation driving Social TV practices is the need for information.

As Benedetta (22 years old) says,

I often watch 'Le Iene'; a few days ago, they were talking about a special healthy diet and, while watching, I used my laptop to go online and look for information about this diet and its effects, and read various scientific papers on this topic.

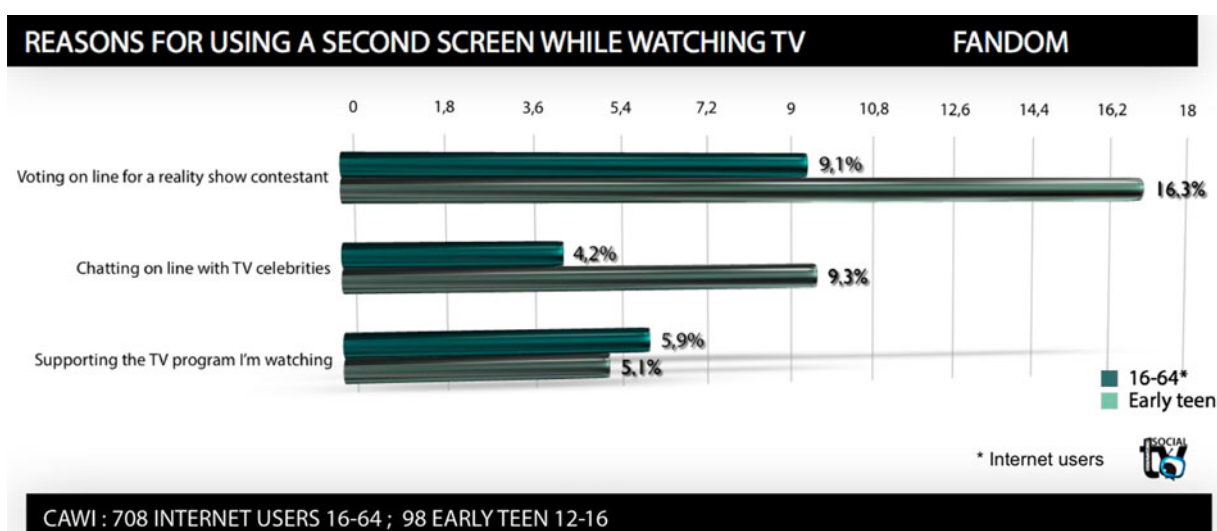
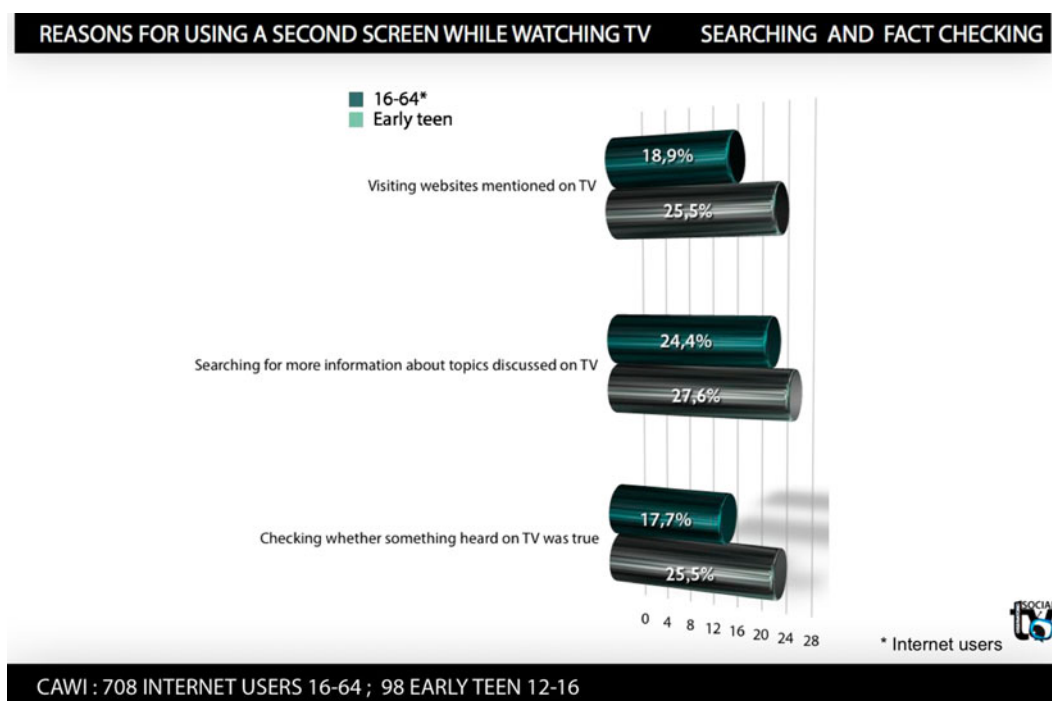
19 H. Jenkins, *Fans, bloggers, and gamers: Exploring participatory culture*, New York University Press, 2006; N. Carpentier, (2001), 'Managing Audience Participation: The Construction of Participation in an Audience Discussion Programme,' *European Journal of Communication*, 16, 2001, p.209-232

20 J. Fiske (1992), 'The cultural economy of fandom,' in: L.A. Lewis, eds, *The adoring audience. Fan, culture and popular media*, Routledge, 1992; H. Jenkins, *Textual Poachers. Television Fans and Participatory Culture*, Routledge, 1992; H. Jenkins, *Convergence Culture. Where Old and New Media Collide*, New York University Press, 2006.

I look for information about TV programs related to pastry and desserts – Rachele adds – because I want to become a pastry chef, so I'm interested! 'Cake Boss', things like that! (Rachele, 14 years old)

When I watch a football game on TV, I look for information about players, transfer trends... Basically, I'm always online (Andrea, 12 years old).

Even in this case, the availability of a connected second screen allows viewers to immediately turn their curiosity for specific TV content into the possibility to search for information on the web. Whether to explore topics related to the TV show (24.4% of adult Internet users vs. 27.6% of early teens), visit websites mentioned or shown on air (18% vs. 25.5%), or fact-check what happens on TV talks (17.5% vs. 25.5%), the consumer experience extends beyond the boundaries of the TV screen.



Therefore, when TV programs are capable of generating engagement (talent shows, reality television, TV series, sport programs), the audience is highly motivated to participate, driven by the desire to contribute to the television content – by voting, for example (9% of adult Internet users vs. 16% of early teens); the need to push TV networks to change the distribution windows of some programs (approximately 5%); or, finally, the wish to establish a (mediated) relationship with TV stars (4% vs. 9%). Within the so-called socially engaged television audiences, we can find the distinctive features of the fandom culture typically related to applications and online environments that break the television linearity, providing a valuable backchannel.

We were at a friend's house; we took a selfie of the three of us watching 'The X-Factor', and posted it online with our comments on the show." (Girl, 17 years old)

3 Social TV Environments

Social TV in Italy is still mainly linked to the audience's experience within social media.

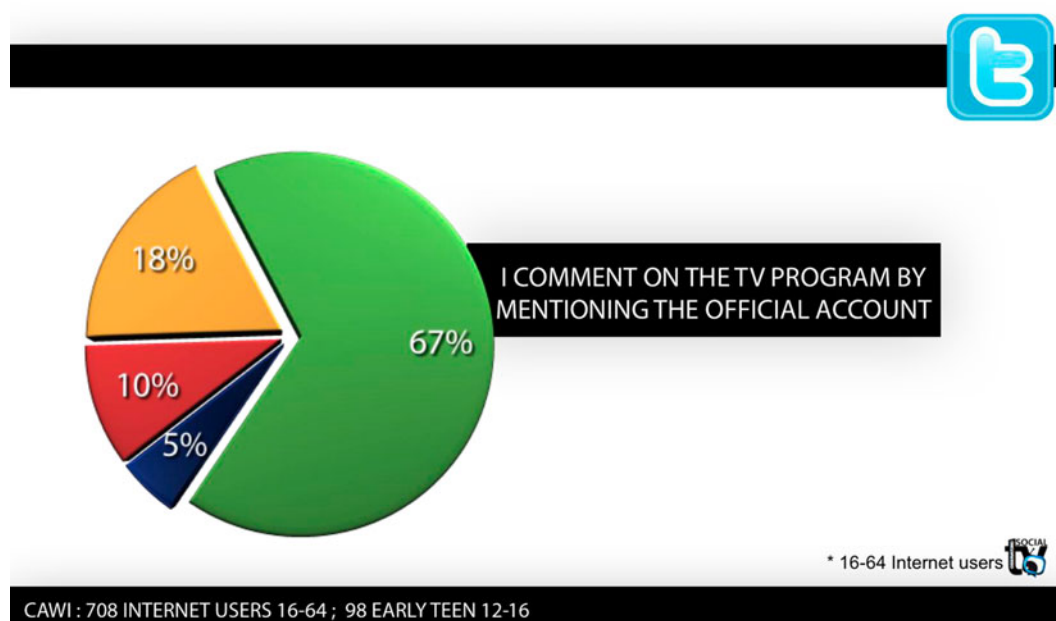
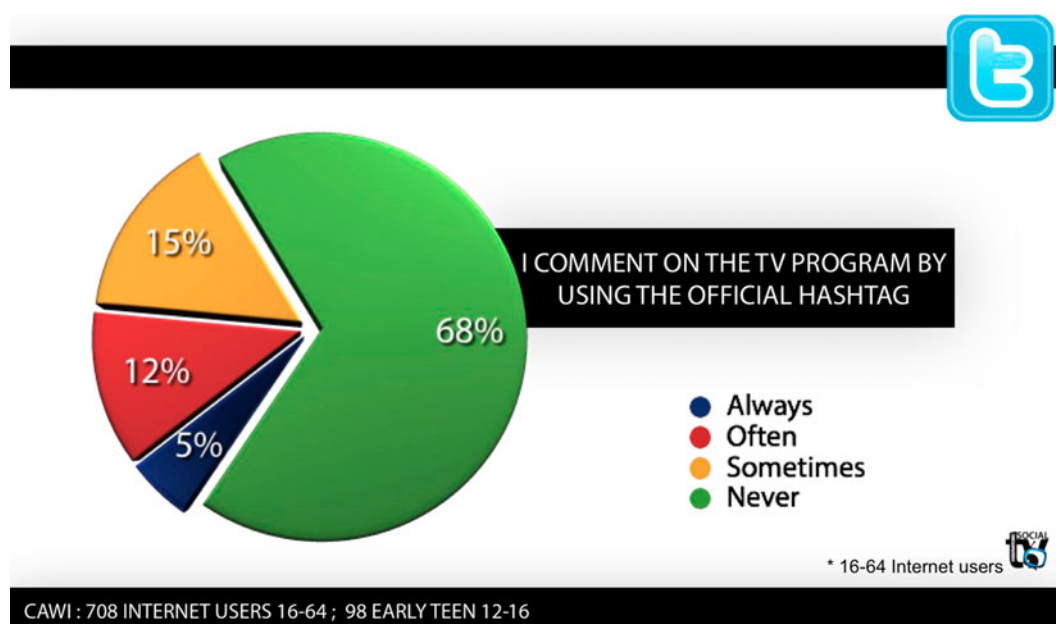
Compared to the development of the social TV ecosystem in the U.S. – which includes general social network sites, social TV analytics, second screen apps and platforms, social curation and syndication tools, interactive TV ad platforms, socially-enabled devices, sharing technology, and more²¹ – socially engaged television audiences in Italy are only experiencing a little part of it, their activities being essentially confined to social networking or, more generally, to online interaction spaces.



Source: <http://adage.com/article/the-media-guy/introducing-social-tv-ecosystem-chart-2-0/243186/>

²¹ See the chapter "Screen + Video Growth = Still Early Innings", Slides 91-126 in *Internet Trends 2014 – Code Conference*, Mary Meeker, May 28, 2014, accessible at: http://s3.amazonaws.com/kpcbweb/files/85/Internet_Trends_2014_vFINAL_-_05_28_14-_PDF.pdf?1401286773, last visited on December 1st, 2014

The most widely used online environments are certainly Twitter and Facebook, which can be regarded as the main access points to social TV. Twitter, in particular, seems to be the ideal partner for social TV, being used in conjunction with events, TV shows and live blogging activities.²² More specifically, the boom of social TV in Italy is strictly related to political talk shows, because it combines the audience's interest in political participation with the spectacularization of politics promoted by television. However, Twitter is rapidly branching out into entertainment programs, such as talent shows and reality television. Our research data shows 5% of heavy users and 10–12% of frequent users.



²² See: <http://www.broadcastnow.co.uk/Journals/2013/01/17/g/f/h/TwitterTV.pdf>, last visited on December 1st, 2014.

It must be noted that the great attention given to Twitter in relation to social TV depends on the fact that Twitter makes it easy to monitor the activities occurring within its environment. Providing access to the 'firehose,' it makes its stream of social data actually quantifiable, allowing broadcasters to capitalize on it.

From the audience's standpoint, Twitter represents a great chance to enhance viewers' engagement, allowing them to share comments with others as if they were all together on a virtually extended couch. Twitter also expands the viewing experience – and therefore the fun – by providing access to an otherwise invisible content: backstage photos, previews, celebrity selfies. This is the true bonus offered by this platform to the audience-fans.²³

As Melania says,

During Sanremo there was a lot of information about what was going on behind the scenes, which was more entertaining than the program itself. Twitter gives you something more, in terms of information, than the mere act of viewing. (Melania, 31 years old)

It can also become a competition – she adds – to see who writes the most hilarious tweet and gets more retweets.

However, according to our data, Twitter is viewed as a complicated and demanding mechanism, which prompts less motivated audience members to quit this platform.

It's so complicated, more than Facebook. I have a Twitter account, but I don't use it." (Lucrezia, 24 years old).

Facebook could certainly be a great resource for social TV, thanks to its mass diffusion and user-friendliness: nearly 50% of our sample reported updating their status with comments about TV shows. However, Facebook is only apparently suitable for social TV practices, its platform being predominantly oriented towards identity and relationship management. Posting comments or sharing movies and music videos on a personal profile – most often after, rather than during, the viewing – are all activities used as identity markers.

As Benedetta (22 years old) says,

I often watch TV series online. Sometimes it happens that something in the show strikes me, and then, when I walk by myself and think back to that particular scene, I post something about it on Facebook, or update my status with something related to that scene.

At the same time, the official pages of TV shows are perceived as a separate environment, often chaotic and disorganized.

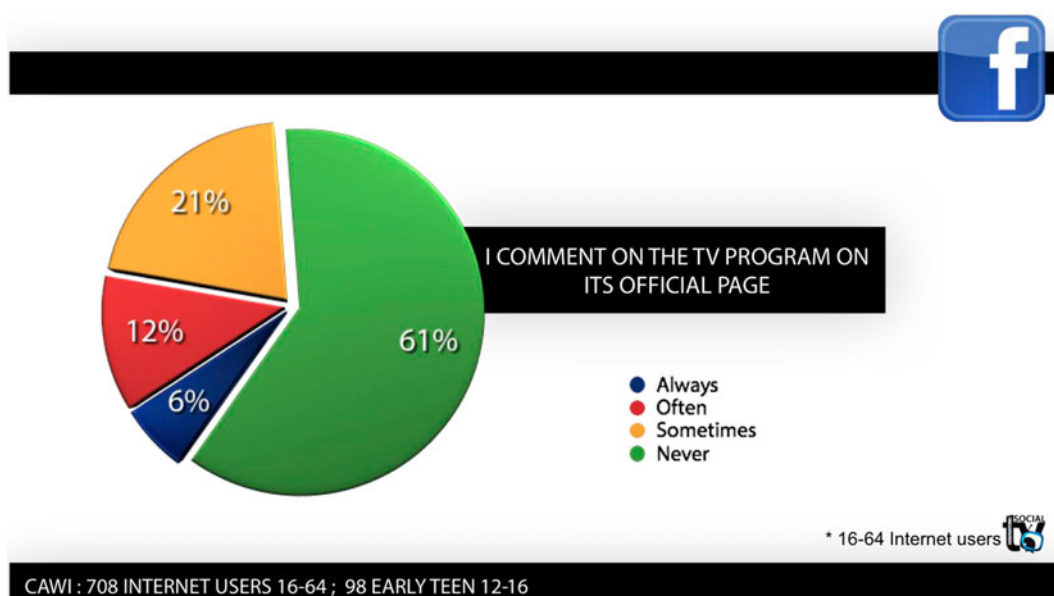
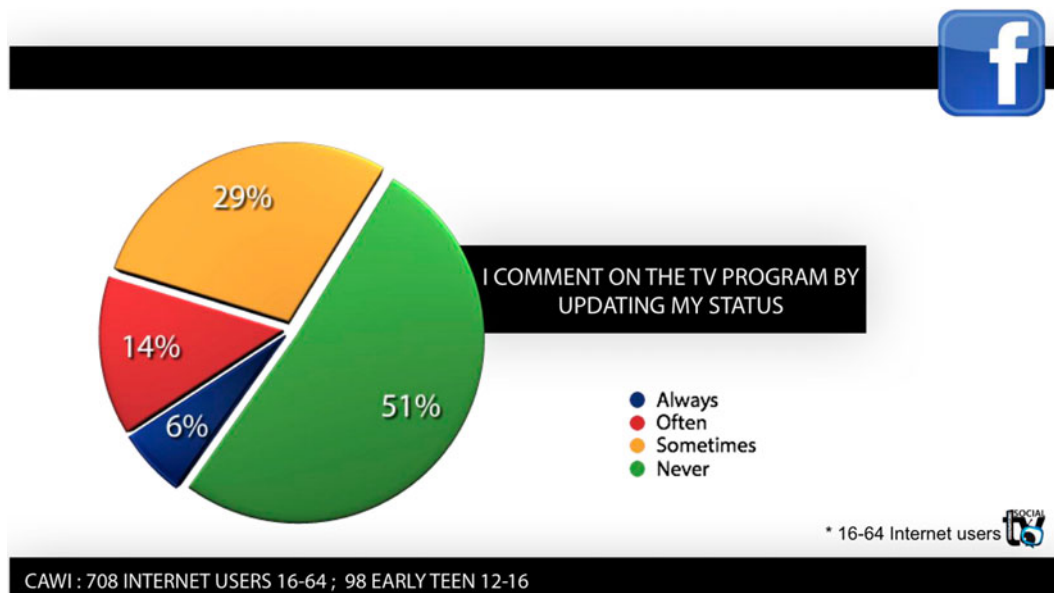
[Facebook official fanpage] gives the impression of being a little static, not very fast in the interaction with fans, sometimes too stiff. (Marco, 32 years old)

A growing phenomenon emerging from our research is Instagram. In showcasing images and events, it borrows the visual register from TV and tabloids, providing an elegant digital version of them. For example, Instagram allows access to TV stars' photographs, giving fans the opportunity to feel in contact with celebrities. It also provides enhanced product placement strategies aimed at prompting fans to purchase online the brands and products shown on TV.

For example, Alessia Marcuzzi (the anchorwoman) always shares her outfit (and clothing brand) on Instagram, before the show goes on air. (Lucia, 16 years old)

In addition to these online environments exploited by TV broadcasters for audience engagement strategies, our study highlights the emergence of an invisible social TV on online chats (22.6% of respondents talk about TV shows on chat),

²³ Tune in with Twitter. Driving Discovery and Engagement with TV. available at <http://www.broadcastnow.co.uk/Journals/2013/01/17/g/f/h/TwitterTV.pdf>

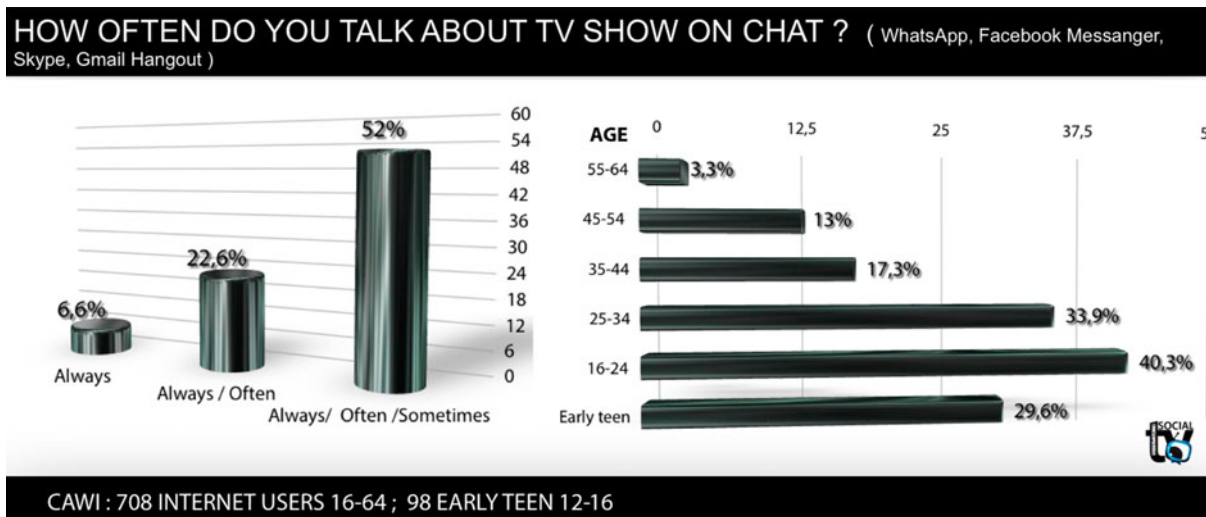


particularly WhatsApp. Especially among younger generations, WhatsApp is perceived as an ideal environment for spontaneous interactions about TV content, being semi-public (individual or group interactions), extremely targeted (I only talk with those who share the same interests as me) and absolutely informal.

WhatsApp is more spontaneous, isn't it? You are not requested to think about the form when you write, as happens on Facebook or Twitter. So you can be more natural, instinctive and profound. (Benedetta, 22 years old)

Conversations on WhatsApp are confidential and users can only be visible to a narrow circle of selected people: this allows them to abandon most of the self-promotion that marks social networking sites.

WhatsApp can also be used to inform and/or remind some distracted friends of what is going on TV and invite them to enjoy their favourite product. More generally, it strengthens the social dimension of television consumption.



4 Conclusions

We can finally point out that social TV in Italy is still in its early stage of development, which is clearly regulated by two main innovative factors. First, we have to consider the role of multiscreening in the transformation of TV consumption. Multiscreening means something more than the mere use of a second screen while watching TV; it represents the evolution of multitasking, which affects the way in which consumers spend their time and carry out everyday activities.²⁴ This is to say that audiences are learning to use more than one device simultaneously, and their multitasking and multiscreening practices have revolutionized the TV consumption experience.

On the other hand, the use of social networking sites, characterized by the strong presence of Twitter and Whatsapp, is having a great impact on social TV practices in Italy, especially in terms of interaction and consumption patterns and viewing time. In particular, with regard to the latter, we may note that social TV practices tend to concentrate during live TV programs (and commercials), and decrease before and after the viewing. More generally, the next goal for broadcasters will be to develop audience engagement strategies able to further enhance the TV watching experience.

Biography

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²⁴ See http://think.withgoogle.com/databoard/media/pdfs/the-new-multi-screen-world-study_research-studies.pdf, last visited on December 1st, 2014