

# The future of the audience in post-television. The case of the italian talk-show Propaganda Live!

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**ABSTRACT.** We live in a very difficult and confusing time of using various media. To undergo this constant process of change is above all the television that seeks a way to reposition itself and adapt to the new type of audience. Our goal is to bring order and shape the future of traditional media. According to Jenkins<sup>2</sup> we will try to better define what is meant by cross-media, trans-media and omnimediality. Many authors give different definitions, but we are sure that we can arrive at a new means of spreading news that is more valid than the previous ones from a qualitative point of view. The objectives of the research is to contribute to forming a new type of text that is both multimedia and interactive. A story inserted in a context that demonstrates how unidirectional communication is no longer possible and where the world of media is increasingly called upon to greater involvement of the end user. The aim is to compete with the latter, which is already partly happening, in an orderly process of cross-media use. The idea that the interaction between television and social media can improve the audience for both is based on a profound change in the way people consume content. Today, watching TV is no longer a passive and solitary experience as it used to be.

**Keywords:** social, television, talk show, audience, internet.

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<sup>2</sup> H. Jenkins, *Cultura Convergente*, Apogeo, Milano 2007



## Introduction

Imagine a live TV program, like a music competition or a talk show. While the viewer is watching the show, they can simultaneously participate in discussions on X, answer polls on Instagram, or comment on behind-the-scenes videos on Facebook. These activities aren't just distractions; they amplify the TV experience, making the viewer feel like an active part of the event. They're not just watching; they're participating in and influencing the conversation around the program. This type of engagement has a dual effect. On the one hand, it increases attention to the TV program: comments on social media can encourage those who aren't watching the live broadcast to tune in, intrigued by the reactions and discussions. On the other hand, social media benefits from a continuous flow of fresh and stimulating content, which keeps users active and interested. It's as if social media becomes a sort of "second screen" that enriches the main TV experience. This synergy between TV and social media not only improves the audience, but also changes its nature. We are moving from an individual consumption to a participatory and community one, creating a virtuous cycle in which television programs fuel conversations on social media and, in turn, these conversations attract new viewers to TV. Furthermore, this phenomenon offers broadcasters and brands the opportunity to better monetize their audience, creating interactive advertising campaigns that exploit both channels in a coordinated way. In essence, the integration between television and social media does not simply increase audience numbers, but transforms the audience experience itself, making it more dynamic, shared and influential.

## Social TV

Phenomenon of the Social TV<sup>3</sup> born from the convergence between social media and television, or a process defined by technological transformations. It is the progressive rapprochement and hybridization between telecommunication and network technologies, computer-computational technologies and the content

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<sup>3</sup> <https://blog.quix.it/social-media-storia-e-evoluzione>

dimension of “traditional” media. To talk about social media it is first of all necessary and proper to make a distinction between this phenomenon and that of Social Networks given that for years the two terms have been used with the same meaning, as synonyms despite the different shades of meaning. When we refer to the term “social media” we are referring to software or applications created with the main objective of sharing audiovisual content such as images, videos, texts and audio files between different users of the web. These types of social media can be defined as real means of communication different from traditional media such as radio, newspaper or television, where the main difference is that these new software allow real interpersonal relationships through users and therefore no longer unilateral communications. We can also distinguish them into different categories based on the type of content they spread; there are blogs, micro blogs, social network sites, collaborative projects, virtual worlds, games and much more. When we talk about social networks instead we refer to a network of people or, a social community, united by the same interests, it is in fact a term born many years ago and it was also used to refer to cultural and sports groups and associations. It is interesting to see how this concept has transformed in the last century from a purely physical idea to something of virtual<sup>4</sup>.

The increasingly intense presence of social networks in everyday life requires careful reflection on the role they play in various sectors of society: in the economy, in politics, in social life. It is possible to formulate some “theses” on social networks with the desire to analyze their most innovative characteristics and their predictable evolution such as their dual value, informative but also communicative. This last characteristic, born especially in the last decade of the twentieth century, has benefited documentary makers and computer scientists having a strong impact not only on large institutions but also on libraries and information services. We are therefore in a historical period in which, on the one hand, the transformation and evolution of the internet to become a vehicle for information content and on the other, the new technologies that are appearing on the global market give rise to a heated debate. On the one hand, those who think that the internet is

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<sup>4</sup> <https://blog.quix.it/social-media-storia-e-evoluzione>

a truly innovative support for communication and on the other, those who believe that its rapid development and transformation would have been useful to transform it into a development tool for information services, institutions and libraries. Especially in the latter, the internet seems to be able to offer so much support and so many spaces to the user to the point of making him autonomous, thus limiting or even canceling in some cases the figure of the specialist and this put them on alert. In this regard, several debates arose whose main limits were on the one hand the simplification of professional figures linked to the library sector through the network and on the other a defensive attitude on the part of third parties. We can therefore speak, in reference to social TV, of a new possibility of interaction between different users through social networks sharing and commenting on television content. We are faced with a new way of enjoying the television medium that draws its foundation from the use of social networks, which allow viewers and users to share their opinions on the program they are watching with millions of other social users through likes, comments, images, whether they are in front of the television or not. The fact that television has become the subject of discussion on social media was inevitable, the virtual population has now reached enormous dimensions, becoming almost as numerous as the entire number of television viewers. The television experience has in fact been enhanced in recent years, both in terms of content and in terms of the size of the current audience and resources. It is interesting to note that, when a viewer of a program decides to publish a personal opinion through social networks, this content passes from television to the web, overcoming temporal and spatial limits linked to the contingent broadcast of the TV program. The contents that are published on social networks by users who are active in relation to a particular program are contents that are destined to continue over time, through sharing, reworking, likes and comments; these contents will continue to travel around the web and reach an increasingly wider audience, even those not directly interested in the program in question.

We can therefore speak of an audience that from passive becomes active and co-author of television content. As the American scholar Jenkins has underlined, it is a mistake to consider this process of convergence only

as a technological transformation, but rather, we should see it as a socio-cultural transformation that has allowed a redefinition of the balance of power and greater interactivity on the part of an audience that since the origins of television has always been passive<sup>5</sup>.

Already in March 2010, a research conducted by Nielsen reported that Facebook and Google were the sites with the most interactions during the television viewing of major events of national interest and international<sup>6</sup>. In January 2011, Yahoo! decided to publish the results and data of a study conducted to analyze the user base of smartphones while watching a tv show<sup>7</sup>. The survey sample consisted of a group of Americans between the ages of 13 and 64, for a total of 8,384 people; the results show that more than half of the sample considered uses the Internet, approximately 86% uses their smartphone while watching a TV program, and only 25% says they use their phone to search for information on the TV program they are watching. As you can imagine, this already huge phenomenon is even more accentuated during major events; an example of this is the 2012 NFL final, which was followed by approximately 111 million viewers, setting a huge record in terms of views. Another piece of data that emerges from the analysis of interaction factors with the NFL final, and which allows us to understand the enormous user base of this phenomenon, is the number of tweets per second, especially in the final minutes and immediately after the game; the number is around 10,245 tweets per second. The data collected by Nielsen in 2017 confirm the enormous dimensions of this phenomenon; in the first four months of the year, approximately 5.1 million people commented on social networks such as Facebook or X every month, while 2,500 contents were broadcast by 34 television channels monitored by the consultancy firm; through 350,000 users per day who comment on social networks their opinions and ideas regarding the programs followed on television. However, it

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<sup>5</sup> H. Jenkins, *Cultura Convergente*, Apogeo, Milano 2007, pp 10 - 20

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.nielsen.com/wp-content/uploads/sites/3/2019/04/nielsen-social-media-report-2012-final.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> <https://advanced-television.com/2011/02/07/research-yahoo-study-reveals-tv%E2%80%99s-future-is-online>

must be kept in mind that these analyses refer only to a small portion of online users, namely those who actively participate in life on social networks. It could therefore also be estimated that around 10 - 15 million users are registered on social networks who are therefore exposed to this activity but not directly active. The number of interactions on social networks exceeds 87 million, reaching a growth of 23% compared to the period before that analyzed<sup>8</sup>. The data collected by Nielsen also offer us valuable information to understand which television programs receive the most interactions; we note that 50% of the interactions concern sporting events, therefore events that are generally broadcast live and not recorded, 30% concern programs such as talent shows or reality shows, with interactions of approximately 38% that occur in the days before or immediately after the broadcast. Finally, Nielsen's analyses offer us interesting insights regarding the demographic aspect of the most active viewers on social networks; from the graph below we see for example that Facebook is a social network that attracts a majority of men mainly interested in sports, while in general we can realize that 70% of users who interact with television programs through social networks are under 44 years<sup>91011</sup>. Now we might ask ourselves whether these interactions by viewers are damaging the television market or not. MIT researcher Wang answers these questions by underlining how the birth of this phenomenon is generating synergies between different media (television and social media) that will bring great advantage to the entire system. The television medium and the digital world are not opposed, they are just used for different purposes: television is effective for building the brand, in building the essence and core values of the brand itself thanks to which it creates notoriety and recognizability. The digital world is instead important in brand extension, because it allows the creation of buzz and diffusion on different platforms, increasing the points of contact with the consumer. Precisely for this reason, to increase the

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<sup>8</sup> <https://www.statista.com/chart/16738/second-screen-usage-while-watching-tv/>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.adcgroup.it/adv-express/big-data/nielsen/nielsen-la-social-tv-coinvolge-32-milioni-di-italiani-og-ni-mese.html> (ultima visualizzazione 19 maggio 2021)

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.nielsen.com/us/en/insights/article/2017/tops-of-2017-television-and-social-media/>

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.nielsen.com/it/it/>

notoriety of a brand, it is necessary to use both media and therefore pass through both television and the digital world. Exploiting only one of the two media would entail enormous risks: the difficulty of building a brand with its values if only the digital world is exploited and therefore the risk of not being able to create a stable relationship with consumers, the risk of damaging the ability of brands to remain in the minds of consumers if one decides to focus only on the digital medium<sup>12</sup>. Speaking of the Italian panorama, 40% of those interviewed by a group of researchers say they watch a TV program only to be able to read the comments related to the program on social media. This allows us to note how the success and diffusion of social TV lies in the fact that the public now plays a highly active role, we are no longer talking about a TV-centric television experience but rather, a user-centric experience, in fact the public, feeling involved and stimulated, returns to watch television with greater attention than before. This new phenomenon of interaction with television can be a factor of great strategic importance for producers and advertisers, in fact in addition to great advantages in terms of reach and the level of the public, there is also a great advantage in terms of the quality of the relationship with the audience. The conversation and interactions on social networks generated around TV programs allow producers to obtain a huge amount of data to analyze the tastes of the audience and therefore to modify their programs and produce more targeted content, thus achieving greater harmony with the public<sup>13</sup>.

### **Audience and its experience**

As mentioned, social TV has been able, in recent years, to radically change the viewer's function in relation to television programs and to transform him from a mere passive viewer to a viewer-actor who interacts, not only with the programs broadcast on television, but also with other users on the web. Precisely for this reason we could define social TV not only as a

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<sup>12</sup> Wang J., 2015. TV, Digital, and Social: A Debate. *Media Industries Journal*, 1.3, p. 60-66

<sup>13</sup> Dumenco, Simon. "Believe the Hype? Four Things Social TV Can Actually Do," *Advertising Age*, April 13, 2012

technological phenomenon, but as a real social experience, which unites and puts in contact not only the viewer with the television program, but also the viewer with other users interested in the same programs, a phenomenon therefore that refers not so much to the content, but more to the experience and relationships established between web users. This particular and interesting type of experience will be destined to change, evolve and improve over time, thanks to social networks, services that are offered by the Internet, generally accessible for free via the World Wide Web or specific smartphone applications, whose main purpose is to facilitate and speed up social relationships by allowing communication and sharing of digital content through simple and fast sentences, links, music, images or videos. In fact, they have allowed anyone to rise to the status of commentator on events, characters and facts brought to the fore by newspapers, radio and TV. What until ten years ago was relegated to the newspaper or TV news, today thanks to social networks such as Facebook, X and Instagram can be shared from any place and at any time and break down space temporary barriers<sup>14</sup>. Thanks to social media, people are closer to friends and relatives and can communicate with them in real time, a completely new possibility for the television medium. Many programs or reality shows such as *Amici*, *L'isola dei famosi* and *Il Grande Fratello* have made the most of the potential of Social TV, focusing on innovation, creativity and interactivity. Many television programs have decided to increase interactivity with the public even more and become even more engaging by showing, in overlay during the live broadcast, the funniest or most original tweets posted by viewers or by publishing, always live, images and videos of what is happening in the program so as to involve viewers not only in the dynamics of the program itself but also in the thoughts and points of view of other users and viewers. Another innovative element of television enjoyment, allowed thanks to social media, is what allows the viewer, after the end of the program itself, to continue the experience through discussion groups, comments or exchanges of opinions between fans and users on the web so as to continue the interest in the programs over time. It is not unusual for a television

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<sup>14</sup> Castells Manuel, *La nascita della società in rete*, sl, Ube Paperback, 2014, pp 10 - 40



program to decide to entrust its fans with the management of its contents. Montpetit states that the practice of television viewing is increasingly resembling that of Internet consumption, moving from the consumption of objects to the consumption of services<sup>15</sup>. Social TV in particular, thanks to this new social experience, allows viewers to enjoy the television medium in a completely new way, a modality that combines the entertainment experience of the traditional television viewer with the interactive experience of the web. The same scholar, however, with the help of Murru, noted that the idea of an increasingly active and participatory viewer was often traced back to the paradigm of participatory culture, while social television could be more correctly interpreted as an international phenomenon, which extends both horizontally and vertically. This new type of experience, which sees citizens and the public as protagonists, also has direct effects on the programs themselves, in fact the users' contents are a precious resource capable of enriching the spaces of many columns of tv<sup>16</sup>.

### **Social TV and postmodern criticism**

The idea of postmodernity appears in the second half of the twentieth century, associated not only with the mass media, but with the disbelief in the ideals of progress, reason and history. Zigmunt Bauman warns about the absence of a clear break or a sequence without any unequivocal break between modernity and the postmodern period. The scholar states that postmodernity is the age of community, desire, research, invention and imagination of community<sup>17</sup>. In the postmodern world there are no spaces outside of the media. Even television, which has always been a medium with considerable influence on society, suffers from the action of digital media.

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<sup>15</sup> Montpetit, M.J (2009), *Your content, your networks, your devices: Social networks meet your TV experience*, *ACM Computers in entertainment*, vol.7 n.3, article 34

<sup>16</sup> Fausto Colombo, *Social TV. Produzione, esperienza e valore nell'era digitale*, sl, Egea, 2015, pp 1- 38

<sup>17</sup> Zygmunt Bauman, *Il disagio della post modernità*, sl, Laterza, 2018, pp 1 - 20

Nelson Hoineff<sup>18</sup> believes that this is a time of reinvention, thanks to the possibilities created by digitalization that puts an end to the idea that television is synonymous with massification and, in this context, the public perceives that generalist TV is only a medium option, not necessarily its form. The relationship between producers and recipients becomes an increasingly complex intertwining, in which the population tends to position itself more and more actively in the communication process, it is what Henry Jenkins calls participatory culture, in which there is no longer complete passivity towards the media; roles are reconfigured in participants who interact at all times, based on a new set of rules that are not yet fully understood. Such a concept is not primarily technological, but cultural<sup>19</sup>. Jenkins's proposal highlights changes in the field of content production, circulation and consumption, emphasizing both the roles of recipients and producers. These changes are occurring on both sides, at a time when media companies are intensifying the flow of different distribution channels, with the aim of increasing revenues and expanding markets. These new behaviors have given rise to a series of phenomena, including the habit of watching TV and accessing the Internet at the same time. The interaction existing between viewers who, at the same time as a program is presented on television, comment on social networks about something that has just been shown, is considered a social TV action; it is an interaction, as well as a socialization, of information related to a certain television content for users of the same social network where the posts are made. Social TV allows a shared experience, experimenting with situations of social uses of television. Experiments have revealed that people are more engaged through contact with a virtual audience. The experience of social TV has led Montpetit, Klym e Blain<sup>20</sup> to relate this phenomenon to the beginnings of television. For the authors there is a rediscovery of the act of watching TV as a shared moment, referring to decades in which the medium was still quite expensive and, therefore, there was only one in each residence. In this scenario, there is the

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<sup>18</sup> Hoineff, Nelson (1996): *A nova televisão: desmassificação e o impasse das grandes redes*

<sup>19</sup> H. Jenkins, *Cultura Convergente, Apogeo*, Milano 2007, pp 10 - 20

<sup>20</sup> M.J. Montpetit, N. Klym, and E. Blain, "The Future of Mobile TV," 2009

empowerment of the public that begins to help in the formatting of their own multimedia environment; however, for this to actually happen, it is necessary for content creators to develop multiple access points to media texts, so that they become propagable and are reconfigured in different groups and nuclei of conversation<sup>21</sup>.

## **Reasons and consequences of the phenomenon**

Among the reasons that can lead people to share on social media an experience that, until a few years ago, was considered individual, we find - as stated Olimpia Cali<sup>22</sup> the need for sharing and participation and therefore the need to feel less alone. This need for company, which most people feel while watching television programs, could derive not only from the need to share good and bad experiences and feelings, starting from the idea that sharing something good means expanding it, while sharing something negative halves it, but also from the need and curiosity to hear the point of view of others regarding a program, a film or a TV series. This curiosity in seeing what people, both socially and culturally close and far from us, think about a program has aroused in us certain emotions and feelings that push us to share our thoughts on the internet generally followed by specific hashtags that have the main objective of attracting people interested in the same program and therefore starting a sharing of ideas and points of view. This idea of sharing with others, one's own points of view, ideas and thoughts regarding television materials, emerges not only from the research and study of Cali, but also from other studies such as that of Han e Lee<sup>23</sup>, whose main objective is to analyze not only the reasons that push the public to use social media during the television experience, but also the forms and platforms of instant messaging used. The main motivations identified by the

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<sup>21</sup> Jenkins, H. (2006). *Convergence culture: Where old and new media collide*.

<sup>22</sup> Cali O. *Social TV: physically alone, virtually connected. New perspectives in studying audience 2.0.*, 2016, XII Congresso Espanol De Sociologia. Gijón, Asturias

<sup>23</sup> Han E. Lee S. Motivations for the complementary use of text-based media during linear TV viewing: An exploratory study. *Computers in human Behavior*, 32, 2014, p. 235-243.

two authors are the following: the communication of one's impressions, the search and sharing of information, the feeling of shared vision, curiosity about the opinions of others, recommendations on programs. These five elements have been collected and identified by scholars through a research in which it emerges that the communication of one's impressions is the strongest and most frequent motivation, immediately followed by a motivation of sharing and research, motivations of visual sensations and curiosity about the ideas and thoughts of others and finally motivations related to recommendations. The results that emerged from this research are subsequently broken down according to the type of program, distinguishing five different genres based on the Nielsen classification: entertainment, drama, news, sports and current affairs. The reasons for this breakdown are to investigate the motivations for sharing in relation to the type of program and therefore not only on the basis of the subjectivity of each individual. In fact, thanks to this classification, we can note that motivations related to the communication of one's impressions are present in all typologies except news, while motivations driven by the desire to seek and share information are predominantly relevant in entertainment programs. When we talk about and analyze sports and entertainment programs, we note that the main motivation is that of sharing, unlike entertainment programs, which is mainly related to the desire to recommend programs. Another noteworthy study is that of scholars Chen e Lin del 2016<sup>24</sup> whose main objective, also in this case, was to analyze the reasons that lead to sharing thoughts and ideas on social media during television viewing. From this study it emerges that there are mainly two factors involved, on the one hand we can talk about social companionship, or the so-called "social companionship" which also in this case derives from an innate need for company and belonging that pushes the public to use social networks with the main objective of feeling part of a larger community. On the other hand, the need for entertainment and the need for information combine to create the so-called "infotainment".

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<sup>24</sup> Chen K., Lin J., Understanding the Effect of Social Television on TV Branding: A Uses and Gratifications Perspective. *Annual conference of the Chinese Communication Society*, Taiwan, May 2016.

THE FUTURE OF THE AUDIENCE IN POST-TELEVISION.  
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## The case study: Propaganda Live!

Propaganda Live, a Friday night talk show is an example of this type of interaction, its host Diego Bianchi draws the attention of the public and encourages them to comment on X by reading the contents of the tweet<sup>25</sup>.



The influence of social media, with a particular focus on X, runs throughout the programme, but reaches its peak in the “social top ten” – a selection of the best content found online. In this segment, posts and tweets are commented on, often used as a starting point to broaden the studio debate or to link to pre-recorded material. The medium audience<sup>26</sup> of the thirty-six episodes is 996 thousand viewers, of which about one hundred thousand are guests who followed Propaganda Live at friends' houses, it is therefore a community program, convivial, that coagulates tribes of listeners ready to

<sup>25</sup> Barra, Luca, e Fabio Guarnaccia, a cura di. *SuperTele. Come guardare la televisione*. Roma: minimum fax, 2021

<sup>26</sup> HuffPost. "È 'Propaganda Live' il Programma Cult della Stagione TV." *Huffington Post Italia*, 19 giugno 2019. [https://www.huffingtonpost.it/cultura/2019/06/19/news/e\\_propaganda\\_live\\_il\\_programma\\_cult\\_della\\_stagione\\_tv-5308255/](https://www.huffingtonpost.it/cultura/2019/06/19/news/e_propaganda_live_il_programma_cult_della_stagione_tv-5308255/)

comment on what happens both at home and on social media. Contrary to what happens for all information programs, the focus of "Propaganda Live" is not on the over 65s, but on 45-54 year olds, with 7% share. The Millennials and Generation Z are growing the most. The authors have built a program that combines the useful and the enjoyable, offering an ironic and attentive hold on the current social and political situation. "Propaganda Live" dedicates a part of the broadcast to posts on social media and it shows, 89% of those who follow it have an Internet station at home.

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