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To cite this article: Jhjh-Syuan Lin, Kuan-Ju Chen & Yongjun Sung (2018) Understanding the Nature, Uses, and Gratifications of Social Television: Implications for Developing Viewer Engagement and Network Loyalty, *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media*, 62:1, 1-20, DOI: [10.1080/08838151.2017.1402904](https://doi.org/10.1080/08838151.2017.1402904)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/08838151.2017.1402904>



Published online: 30 Jan 2018.



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Understanding the Nature, Uses, and Gratifications of Social Television: Implications for Developing Viewer Engagement and Network Loyalty

Jhjh-Syuan Lin, Kuan-Ju Chen , and Yongjun Sung

This study employed an online survey (N = 310) to explore how viewers' motivations for social TV participation influence their involvement in social TV activities, their program commitment, and network loyalty. Findings show that social infotainment and social companionship are the primary motivations of social TV participation. However, only social infotainment significantly predicts the intensity of viewers' social TV usage, which has a positive influence on program commitment and network loyalty. Additionally, the relationship between social TV usage and network loyalty is partially mediated by program commitment. These findings demonstrate the value of social TV to broadcasters and provide directions for initiating and maintaining long-term relationships with viewers.

The proliferation of digital platforms and portable devices has transformed the traditional TV viewing experience. According to Nielsen (2016), about 60% of smartphone and tablet users turn to their devices as second screens while watching TV several times a week or more. Nearly one-quarter of multiscreeners' device activities are program related, including socializing or performing searches related to programs, watching or sharing program-related video clips, and participating in program-related activities and discussions on social media (IAB, 2015).

This emerging phenomenon, known as social TV, describes "the increasing integration of television and computer technology to support sociale, computer-

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mediated group viewing experiences" (Oehlberg, Ducheneaut, Thornton, Moore, & Nickell, 2006, p. 251). Such a multiscreen, multitasking consumption environment has encouraged viewers to watch TV live, to interact with other viewers in real time, and to turn TV viewing into online events (Lee & Andrejevic, 2014). In light of that, content providers, including major broadcasting networks (e.g., ABC, Fox, NBC, and CBS) and streaming Web sites (e.g., Netflix, Hulu, Amazon), have embraced social components as a means of helping promote shows, attract new viewers, engage fan bases, and leverage the influence of those viewers (Bondad-Brown, Rice, & Pearce, 2012; Larsson, 2013).

Considering that digital channels have a discernible presence among viewers wishing to socialize about programming, some industrial and academic research suggests that viewers' social TV participation may provide both broadcasters and advertisers opportunities to monitor, engage, and target audiences more effectively (Lee & Andrejevic, 2014; Manjoo, 2015; Nielsen, 2015). For example, Lim, Hwang, Kim, and Biocca (2015) proposed three dimensions of social TV engagement (i.e., functional, emotional, and communal engagement) and examined the relationships between social TV engagement and sports events viewers' tendencies to remain loyal in viewing a current channel. Lee and Andrejevic (2014) discussed how social TV conversations across screens might help amplify content awareness, shape viewing behavior, and effectively link TV content to ad exposure and consumption behavior. Nagy and Midha's (2014) empirical findings showed that social TV conversations with brand mentions are significant for brand sponsors to earn additional impressions, drive brand awareness among the earned audience, and inspire the audience to learn more about and engage with the brands.

Despite the growing attention that has been paid to the phenomenon of social TV, more research endeavors are needed to further assess its nature and impact. To that end, the goal of this research is twofold. First, the research aims to provide a better understanding of the drivers of viewers' social TV activities. Second, the research attempts to examine the consequences of viewers' social TV participation. Specifically, this research builds on the uses and gratifications (U&G) framework, the literature on TV network branding, and the relationship paradigm to investigate viewers' motivations of their social TV usage, the extent to which they participate in social TV activities, the resulting psychological mechanism underlying viewers' devotion to shows, and behavioral tendencies regarding their future program choices. The findings of this study will not only contribute to a theoretical understanding of the effectiveness of social TV strategies, but also will help TV broadcasters unlock the full capacity of these strategies.

Theoretical Framework

TV Branding and Social TV

With ever increasing market competition and audience fragmentation, building a strong media brand that provides competitive advantages in the market is becoming more essential for success (Chan-Olmsted, 2011; Lis & Post, 2013). As viewership and revenue have become challenging for broadcasters, they have tried to exploit distinct brand images and brand personalities to combat fierce competition (Chan-Olmsted & Cha, 2008), consequently leading to stronger associations between networks' brand communication and that of the programs they schedule (Drinkwater & Uncles, 2007). Evolving alongside social media communication, broadcasters have utilized social TV strategies to attract and maintain viewers, hoping to increase viewership and advertising revenue (Cha, 2016; Greer & Ferguson, 2011; Lee & Andrejevic, 2014). In particular, broadcasters have employed social media platforms to promote their shows, keep viewers' attention, provide a virtual group-viewing experience, and capitalize on real-time conversations around their shows, tactics that are implemented to help sustain and enhance viewer engagement and drive on-air ratings (Gross, Fetter, & Paul-Stueve, 2008; Manjoo, 2015).

As such, social media have been coupled with programs by broadcasters aiming to add connections to their audiences (Gross et al., 2008). Based on previous research, social TV is conceived as a computer-mediated interface that capitalizes on the simultaneity of viewers' multiscreening activities (IAB, 2015; Lim et al., 2015; Shin, 2013). Social TV applications add an interactive layer to TV viewing experiences by providing spaces for viewers to socialize, bond over the shows they love, and enjoy the collective knowledge and information shared by a larger community of viewers (Gross et al., 2008; Lee & Andrejevic, 2014). Owing to shared affiliation and social interactions between viewers around a program, they are able to experience a sense of togetherness based on the exchange of program-related information (Miller, 2009; Shin, 2013) and, in turn, increase their emotional investment (Pagani & Mirabello, 2011). Such a synched second screen phenomenon helps develop meaningful relationships among viewers of the same TV program (Chorianopoulos & Lekakos, 2008) and expands opportunities that viewers may have for monitoring information about other viewers' reactions (Cohen & Lancaster, 2014).

Additionally, social TV activities may function as "social glue" and represent ritualistic characteristics to viewers within the program network, thereby adding profound symbolic meanings beyond the program content (Lee & Lee, 1995). Lim and associates (2015) discovered that viewers' functional and communal engagement via social TV leads to a sense of co-presence of other viewers. While viewers' communal engagement is directly related to channel loyalty, the relationship between their emotional engagement and channel loyalty is mediated by channel commitment. The researchers suggest that each dimension of social TV engagement contributes uniquely to strengthening the emotional bond between broadcasters and

viewers, and helps transform viewers into the most avid fans. Considering the value and importance of engaging viewers via social TV activities, we applied the U&G approach to explore the motivations underlying viewers' social TV participation.

Uses and Gratifications of Social TV Activities

The U&G approach suggests that media users are goal directed and actively involved in media usage to gratify their needs and wants (Katz, Blumler, & Gurevitch, 1974; Papacharissi & Rubin, 2000). The approach has been used to explore "(1) the social and psychological origins of (2) needs, which generate (3) expectations of (4) the mass media or other sources, which lead to (5) differential patterns of media exposure (or engagement in other activities), resulting in (6) need gratifications and (7) other consequences" (Katz et al., 1974, p. 20). In line with that, Katz, Haas, and Gurevitch (1973) assembled a list of social and psychological needs by which individuals may render a medium more or less satisfactory, given that different media may offer a unique combination of attributes, characteristic content, and social and physical contexts. As individuals today have more and more media choices owing to the advances in media-related technology (Ruggiero, 2000), researchers have applied this theoretical approach to examining motivations for Internet usage (e.g., Lin & Cho, 2010). For instance, Korgaonkar and Wolin (1999) identified seven gratification factors of Internet use and suggested that individuals use the Internet for reasons beyond information retrieval. While Papacharissi and Rubin (2000) identified five primary motives for using the Internet (interpersonal utility, pastime, information seeking, convenience, and entertainment), Ko, Cho, and Roberts (2005) classified four motivational dimensions (information, convenience, entertainment, and social interaction) of Internet usage.

Because social networking sites provide users with opportunities for diversification of integrated communication and media use behaviors (Ellison, Steinfield, & Lampe, 2007; Park & Lee, 2014), much research attention has been devoted to understanding the types of gratification sought from social media usage. For example, Papacharissi and Mendelson (2011) examined how motives and social-psychological traits influence the use of Facebook and other social network related outcomes. In their study, the motives of habitual pastime and relaxing entertainment emerged from the analysis as prevalent motives for Facebook usage, whereas escapism and companionship were also found to be moderately salient motives. Park, Kee, and Valenzuela (2009) discovered that college students used Facebook Groups to fulfill socializing, entertainment, self-status seeking, and information-related needs. Similarly, Park and Lee (2014) noted that entertainment, relationship maintenance, self-expression, and communication motivations were significantly related to Facebook use intensity.

Because viewers consume programs and actively engage in program-related discussions and activities on social media (Nagy & Midha, 2014), the U&G approach, when applied to the current context, helps explain how viewers engage

in social TV activities to gratify different needs, understand motivations for social TV participation, and identify psychological and behavioral consequences following these needs (Katz et al., 1974; Ruggiero, 2000). Research to discover viewers' motives for social TV participation across screens has investigated how program-related perceptions (i.e., program affinity, involvement, and genre preference), social media characteristics (i.e., compatibility, perceived ease of use, and social presence), and audience attributes (i.e., user motivations, innovativeness, and social characteristics) predict social TV viewing (Guo & Chan-Olmsted, 2015). Ten motivations of viewers' use of social media to engage with TV content: relaxation, companionship, passing time, entertainment, information, arousal, escape, access, learning, and interpersonal utility were identified; however, only passing time was a significant motivation, and viewers who were driven by this motive were found less likely to engage in social TV activities (Guo & Chan-Olmsted, 2015). More recently, Cha (2016) conducted four focus group sessions and found that viewers' social TV seeking behaviors are driven by interpersonal communication (i.e., a sense of community, social bonding with existing networks, and information sharing), self-presentation driven (i.e., reinforcement of online persona, entertainment, self-documentation, and expression of attachment to TV shows), and benefit driven (i.e., incentives and supporting social movements). To provide further empirical and objective observations that help advance the understanding of social TV, we first explore motivations for social TV usage and then examine how viewers' different motivations drive actual social TV activities.

RQ₁: What are viewers' motivations for engaging in social TV activities?

RQ₂: How do viewers' varied motivations affect social TV usage?

Consequences of Social TV Activities

TV Program Commitment. As a vital construct in the context of consumer-brand relationships, commitment represents the degree to which a consumer experiences a long-term orientation and attitudinal disposition toward a brand within a product class (Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2002). The literature shows that committed consumers in brand relationships can resist attitude change and continue to show preference toward the product or brand that they are committed to (Sung & Choi, 2010; Thomson, MacInnis, & Park, 2005). Some researchers have examined a wide range of antecedents of brand commitment, including product involvement (e.g., Mittal & Lee, 1989), brand trust and affect (e.g., Chaudhuri & Holbrook, 2002), a brand's self-relevance (e.g., Eisingerich & Rubera, 2010), and more. In addition, empirical studies have revealed how consumers' virtual experiences with a brand may lead to brand

commitment and escalating engagement (e.g., Chan & Li, 2010; Laroche, Habibi, Richard, & Sankaranarayanan, 2012; Turri, Smith, & Kemp, 2013).

In this research, we believe the same logic may apply to the increasingly crowded broadcast environment, where the facilitation of bonding relationships with viewers and the build-up of engagement are key determinants for the success of TV branding (Lim et al., 2015). By analogy, commitment is applied to characterize the intensity of viewer engagement in viewer-program relationships. In that sense, TV program commitment is defined as “a viewer’s long-term attitudinal disposition toward a program, often reflecting emotional or psychological attachment to the program” (Lin, Sung, & Chen, 2016, p. 172). Thus, we hypothesize that social TV participation may increase viewers’ commitment to the program (Lim et al., 2015). Social TV activities allow viewers to interact with broadcasters, create and share program-related content, and connect with other like-minded viewers (Nielsen, 2014). These active viewers are likely to be devoted to their beloved programs and draw out rituals associated with their program viewing for as long as possible (Gantz, Wang, Paul, & Potter, 2006). Their commitment level may, therefore, emerge as a consequence of increasing dependence in the viewer-program relationship (Lin et al., 2016; Rusbult, Martz, & Agnew, 1998). In the multiscreen world, committed viewers are likely to be those “who become particularly attached to certain programs or stars within the context of a relatively heavy media use” (Abercrombie & Longhurst, 1998, p. 138). That is, the more viewers become involved in social TV activities, the more likely they will be to engage with the programs as they develop a strong sense of familiarity and commitment to them. Hence, the following hypothesis is put forth:

H₁: Viewers’ social TV usage will be positively associated with TV program commitment.

Network Loyalty. Brand loyalty, “a deeply held commitment to rebuy or repatronize a preferred product or service consistently in the future, despite situational influences and marketing efforts having the potential to cause switching behavior” (Oliver, 1997, p. 392), is among the most important outcomes sought by marketers for sustainable competitive advantage (Aaker, 1992; Oliver, 1999). In the competitive media marketplace, loyalty has been studied with regard to channels/networks, types of programs, and particular programs (Brosius, Wober, & Weimann, 1992). Specifically, network loyalty has been defined as “the extent to which viewers tend to view programs from one channel rather than distributing their viewing time equally among different channels” (Cohen, 2002, p. 206). Although technological advances and channel availability have been found to decrease network loyalty among viewers, it is still considered important for maintaining and enhancing viewership (Brosius et al., 1992). In fact, while TV broadcasters strive for differentiation in the viewers’ minds, the need to develop a familiar and positive brand image has become even more important (Chan-Olmsted, 2011; Lyn, Atkin, &

Abelman, 2002). For broadcasters, their branding efforts are intended to establish brand equity, create network loyalty and station identification among viewers, and generate viewer inertia and the resulting inheritance effects (Lyn et al., 2002; McDowell & Sutherland, 2000). Prior research suggests that programs with high ratings are likely to cultivate proportionately greater liking and repeat viewing among viewers than less popular programs (Barwise, 1986; McDowell & Sutherland, 2000). Therefore, broadcasters seek to maintain viewers' channel viewing consistency and thereby obtain a steady base of viewers.

As Lewin, Rajamma, and Paswan (2015) suggested, viewers' involvement, which is defined as activities and behaviors surrounding a program that satisfy viewers' personal interests and provide affective rewards (Funk, Beaton, & Alexandris, 2012), is positively related to their loyalty toward the program. Therefore, it seems plausible that viewers' involvement in social TV will be positively related to their loyalty toward the programs that, in turn, lead to loyalty toward the broadcasters who air the programs (Sharp, Beal, & Collins, 2009). In addition, Ha and Chan-Olmsted (2004) revealed that features on TV Web sites inform viewers about the media content, facilitate their participation in the production process, and help develop brand loyalty. Broadcasters today have recognized the importance of online communication; they have incorporated social TV strategies that offer them opportunities to service viewers with information and interact with them, while also helping to enhance viewer loyalty to the network (Greer & Ferguson, 2011). Viewers that engage in social TV activities are likely to become loyal toward those broadcasters that interact with them. Additionally, viewers' social TV participation may provide them with opportunities to observe, feel part of, and share experiences with other viewers within the virtual community (Cohen & Lancaster, 2014). Their integration and engagement within such a community may therefore help maintain and enhance loyalty (McAlexander, Schouten, & Koenig, 2002). Taken together, H_2 is:

H_2 : Viewers' social TV usage will be positively associated with network loyalty.

As the literature suggests, strong commitment makes individuals more likely to remain in relationships with their partners (Rusbult, 1983; Wieselquist, Rusbult, Foster, & Agnew, 1999) and promotes a variety of relationship maintenance behaviors (e.g., Van Lange et al., 1997). In the branding context, consumer commitment is a central construct in the development and maintenance of brand relationships and an important antecedent to brand loyalty (Iglesias, Singh, & Batista-Foguet, 2011; Morgan & Hunt, 1994). Therefore, it is logical to assume that once viewers are committed and emotionally attached to a particular TV program, their positive feelings can be transferred from the program to the broadcaster wherein their particular program is produced and branded. Such positive attitudes toward a broadcaster will exert an influence on their repeated viewing behaviors, reflecting a conscious decision to continue choosing programs from the same channel. In an effort to test the relationship between TV program commitment and network loyalty

to ascertain whether the relationships identified in previous branding studies can be supported in the current context, the following hypothesis is suggested:

H₃: Viewers' TV program commitment will be positively associated with network loyalty.

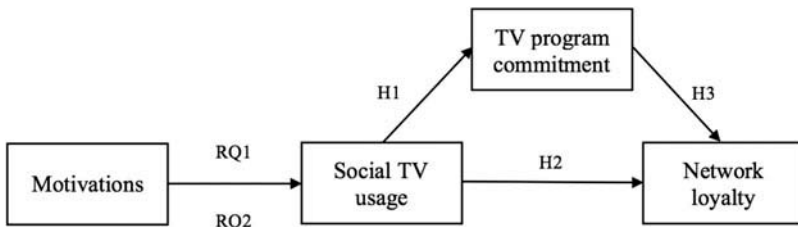
Method

Participants and Procedures

To investigate the antecedents and consequences of viewers' social TV participation (see Figure 1), a survey was employed to answer the proposed research questions and test the hypotheses. The survey was administered on Qualtrics, an online survey software and platform. The participants were recruited via Qualtrics Panel services in mid-2014. A random sample of 2,000 participants, between 18 and 49 years of age, who had previously participated in social TV activities, received an invitation email with a link to the survey questionnaire. A total of 345 participants completed the survey (17.25% response rate) and were compensated with various rewards through Qualtrics.

In the survey questionnaire, participants were first asked to indicate a TV program they liked and the amount of time they had spent watching the program. They were then asked to indicate the device they used most frequently to watch the program. In reference to the self-selected program, participants responded to questions pertaining to the social TV platforms they used; program-related activities they participated in; motivations, frequency, and duration of their social TV usage; TV program commitment; and network loyalty. Finally, participants provided demographic information.

Figure 1
Proposed Conceptual Model



Measures

Social TV Usage. In order to identify participants' social TV usage, a series of questions was included. Participants were asked to indicate their program-related social TV usage across platforms (e.g., Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, Instagram, program's official Web site or blog) and to select specific social TV activities from a predetermined list (e.g., watch program-related videos, check program-related updates, participate in program-related discussions). They were also asked to report the frequency and duration of their weekly use of social TV activities on a seven-point scale. An index score was calculated by multiplying the frequency and duration to determine participants' social TV usage following Paek, Hove, Jung, and Cole's (2013) procedure.

Motivations of Social TV Usage. To measure motivations for social TV usage, Papacharissi and Mendelson's (2011) and Park and associates' (2009) instruments were adopted to construct four a priori categories: social ($\alpha = .94$, $M = 3.76$, $SD = 1.59$), companionship ($\alpha = .91$, $M = 3.03$, $SD = 1.59$), entertainment ($\alpha = .91$, $M = 4.33$, $SD = 1.66$), and information ($\alpha = .91$, $M = 4.11$, $SD = 1.65$). The 12 items included: "I want to meet interesting people," "It makes me feel less lonely," "It is entertaining," "I want to get more information about the show," among others (see Table 2). As with each of the scales discussed below, the items were measured on a seven-point Likert scale, anchored by *strongly disagree* (1) and *strongly agree* (7).

TV Program Commitment. The commitment measure was adopted from Rusbult's (1983) and Sung and Choi's (2010) studies, and modified to measure viewers' commitment level toward their self-selected programs. The items used included: "I feel more attached to this broadcast network over other broadcast networks," "I pay more attention to this broadcast network over other broadcast networks," and "I am more interested in this broadcast network over other broadcast networks" ($\alpha = .94$, $M = 4.53$, $SD = 1.45$).

Network Loyalty. The measurement items of network loyalty were adopted and modified from Yi and Jeon's (2003) and Yoo and Donthu's (2001) studies. The final seven-item measurement included: "It is very important for me to choose TV program content from this broadcast network," "I always find myself consistently choosing TV program content from this broadcast network," "I am a loyal viewer of this broadcast network," and more ($\alpha = .93$, $M = 4.73$, $SD = 1.21$).

Results

Sample Characteristics

A total of 310 responses (49.4% female, $M_{age} = 36.0$, $SD_{age} = 8.53$) were used for data analysis after eliminating cases that took less than one-third of the median time to answer and respondents who exhibited extreme and consistent rating patterns. Approximately 82.6% were Caucasian, 6.8% were African-American, 5.5% were Asian, 2.6% were Hispanic, and 2.6% were multiracial or “other.” See Table 1 for demographic information.

On average, participants had watched the program of their choice for about 3.65 years ($SD = 3.81$). They watched program content most frequently on TV (81.9%), followed by computer or laptop (13.9%), and tablet or smartphone (4.2%). Most participants (42.6%) watched the program while it was on air, 32.3% watched at later dates, and 25.2% spent about equal time watching on air and at

Table 1
Sample Demographic Characteristics (N = 310)

Demographic variables	Frequency (N)	Percentage (%)
Male	157	50.6
Female	153	49.4
18–29	78	25.1
30–39	109	35.2
40–49	123	39.7
Caucasian	256	82.6
African-American	21	6.8
Asian	17	5.5
Hispanic	8	2.6
Multiracial	4	1.3
Others	4	1.3
Less than high school	3	1.0
High school or equivalent	66	21.3
Some college	79	25.5
2-year college degree	30	9.7
4-year college degree	96	31.0
Master’s degree	33	10.6
Professional degree (MD, JD, etc.)	3	1.0
Single	83	26.8
Married	166	53.5
Divorced	18	5.8
Living with someone	34	11.0
Separated	6	1.9
Widowed	3	1.0

Table 2
Exploratory Factor Analysis (N = 310)

	Factor Loadings	
	1	2
Factor 1: Social infotainment		
I participate in social TV activities because:		
It is entertaining.	.902	
It is funny.	.859	
It is exciting.	.841	
I want to learn what others think about the show.	.810	
I want to talk about the show with other viewers.	.804	
I want to get more information about the show.	.759	
I want to get useful information to make predictions of the show.	.739	
I want to meet interesting people.	.625	
Factor 2: Social companionship		
I don't want to be alone.		.912
It makes me feel less lonely.		.899
There is no one else to talk to when I watch the show.		.793
I want to feel like I belong to a community.		.634
<i>Eigenvalue</i>	8.05	1.37
<i>Cronbach's Alpha</i>	.95	.91

later dates. Of the participants (57.5%) who had watched the TV program at later dates, 31.0% reported watching on DVR, 16.5% on Netflix, 12.9% on network Web sites, 4.8% on Hulu, 4.2% on YouTube, and 4.8% on Amazon. Regarding participants' selection of social TV platforms, Facebook (49%) was used most frequently, followed by YouTube (33.9%), the program's official Web site or blog (22.9%), and Twitter (17.7%). Participants reported engaging in the following social TV activities more often than others: Checking in to the program (37.1%), watching program-related videos (37.1%), checking program-related updates (32.3%), seeing program-related photos (31.3%), and finding out what other people think about the program (26.5%).

Exploratory Factor Analysis

To answer RQ₁, an exploratory factor analysis (EFA) using principle components extraction and varimax rotation was employed to identify what motivations for social TV usage might exist. An eigenvalue greater than 1.0 was required to retain a factor (Table 2). The EFA yielded two interpretable factors. The first factor was relabeled social infotainment ($\alpha = .79$, $M = 4.13$, $SD = 1.53$), which accounted for 47.52% of

Table 3
Zero-Order Correlations, Means, and Standard Deviations

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
1. Social infotainment	1	.73**	.61**	.33**	.37**	4.13	1.53
2. Social companionship		1	.47**	.36**	.33**	3.18	1.54
3. Social TV usage			1	.33**	.37**	9.70	9.71
4. TV program commitment				1	.83**	4.53	1.45
5. Network loyalty					1	4.73	1.21

Note. ** $p < .01$ (2-tailed).

the variance after rotation. It combined items of entertainment, social, and information motivations, indicating the need to be entertained, to exchange information concerning the program, and to connect with other like-minded viewers. The second factor was social companionship ($\alpha = .81$, $M = 3.18$, $SD = 1.54$), which accounted for 31.03% of the variance after rotation. It suggested the tendency to satisfy needs for belonging and be members of a community through engagement in social TV activities. Responses to the retained items were summed and averaged to form the scales representing each factor for the following analyses.

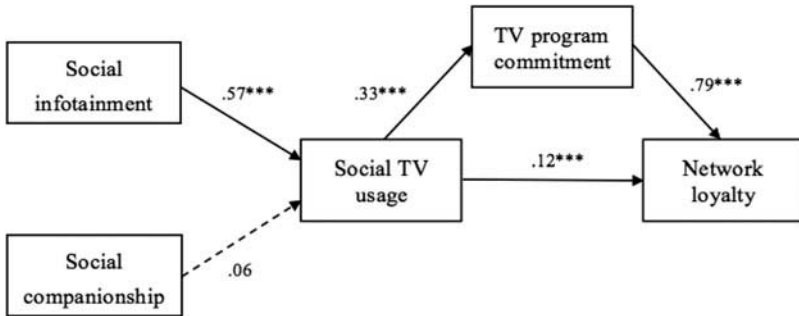
Path Analysis

A correlation analysis of all variables included in the proposed conceptual model was conducted (Table 3). All correlation coefficients of pairwise associations were positive and significant ($p < .01$).

A path analysis was conducted to examine the proposed RQ₂ and hypotheses. The results showed good goodness-of-fit indices ($\chi^2 = 23.91$, $df = 4$, $p < .001$, GFI = .97, TLI = .94, NFI = .97, CFI = .98, SRMR = .08), indicating that the model was valid and acceptable. Specific to RQ₂, the results (Figure 2) showed that social infotainment motivation was significantly and positively associated with social TV usage ($\beta = .57$, $p < .001$). However, the association between social companionship and social TV usage was not significant ($\beta = .06$, $p = .39$). As for the proposed hypotheses, viewers' social TV usage was found to be positively associated with TV program commitment ($\beta = .33$, $p < .001$) and network loyalty ($\beta = .12$, $p < .001$). The significant results suggest that the more viewers engage in social TV activities, the higher their commitment level toward the program and their network loyalty. Therefore, H₁ and H₂ were supported. In addition, the findings revealed a significant positive association between TV program commitment and network loyalty ($\beta = .79$, $p < .001$), providing clear support for H₃.

With the validated model, additional analysis was performed to evaluate the mediation of TV program commitment on the relationship between social TV

Figure 2
Path Coefficients of the Conceptual Model



Note. *** $p < .001$. Dotted line indicates non-significant path.

usage and network loyalty. A formal test of mediation analysis using a bootstrap procedure ($N = 2,000$ samples) showed that the direct effect of social TV usage on network loyalty was .12, with a bootstrap standard error of .03 (95% CI: .06, .18, $p < .01$). The indirect effect of social TV usage on network loyalty through TV program commitment was .26, with a bootstrap standard error of .04 (95% CI: .18, .33, $p < .01$). Taken together, the significant direct and indirect effects suggested that TV program commitment partially mediated the relationship between social TV usage and network loyalty.

Discussion

This study is one of the first empirical attempts to understand the uses and gratifications of viewers' social TV participation and to examine how social TV strategies contribute to the development of audience engagement and network loyalty through the lens of viewer-program relationships. Today, more and more real-time conversations around programming take place in digital channels across screens; viewers like to watch live programming more when there are social TV components involved (Lee & Andrejevic, 2014; Nielsen, 2015). Our findings indicate that participants interacted with programs and other viewers on social media and program-related Web sites as an extension of their viewing experience. While the literature has shown the important role of programs' official Web sites for TV branding (Ha & Chan-Olmsted, 2004), the empirical findings here give further evidence that social media platforms have garnered mainstream appeal. Considering that the complicated media marketplace is now filled with infinite

content, broadcasters need to make sure their social TV strategies are synergistic across platforms and are responsive to viewers' needs and expectations.

Building on the previously discussed U&G studies, social infotainment and social companionship emerged from the a priori categories as the primary motivations of social TV use. The social infotainment motive comprises items related to entertainment, social interaction, and exchange of information, while the social companionship motive comprises items related to companionship and need for belonging. Although Guo and Chan-Olmsted (2015) noted that social TV participation is more likely driven by instrumental than ritualized needs, our findings suggest that these two orientations are not dichotomous but are more likely interrelated (Rubin, 1984).

While the motivations that emerged consisted of items similar to Guo and Chan-Olmsted's (2015) and Cha's (2016) results, our findings provide additional insights into the predictive power of motivations behind social TV usage in explaining active viewers' multiscreen, multitasking media consumption and expectations. The positive relationship between social infotainment motive and social TV participation suggests that the more viewers are driven by social, entertainment, and information-related gratifications, the more frequently they engage in social TV activities and spend more time on them. Indeed, social TV provides a gateway for viewers to express or receive messages that are favorable to the programs they follow or how they relate to other fellow viewers (Cha, 2016; Lim et al., 2015; Ruggiero, 2000). Such selective exposure (i.e., demassification) to tailored messages regarding specific programs results in habitual social TV usage and brings pleasure (i.e., entertainment) to the viewers (Shin, 2013). Moreover, as Cohen and Lancaster (2014) suggested, social TV supports the group-viewing experience as it permits viewers to exchange program-related information and monitor information about other viewers' emotional states. The information gathered on social TV can serve as a recommendation system that satisfies viewers' motivations for information seeking when choosing programs or channels. Thus, the momentum of social TV is likely to influence viewers' program and network choices. Our findings also show that participants demonstrated a need for company and need to belong and, therefore, engaged in social TV activities to feel part of a larger community of viewers (Cohen & Lancaster, 2014). However, the social companionship motive did not emerge as a significant predictor of viewers' social TV use intensity. Interpreted further, the frequency and duration of viewers' social TV usage is driven by program-related amusement, information-seeking, and program-induced social connections among viewers, not by their sense of belonging or feelings of mediated co-viewing while being physically alone. Therefore, the social infotainment value of social TV activities should be made salient to viewers.

This study further sheds light on the psychological and behavioral consequences of social TV participation. Drawing on the consumer-brand relationships and TV branding literature, TV program commitment is conceptualized and measured to understand viewers' psychological disposition toward programs. This psychological attempt draws on different theoretical origins to study media users' internal states toward media content and brands. Our findings reveal a positive influence of social

TV participation on escalating viewers' commitment toward programs. This implies that social TV strategies provide broadcasters with abundant touchpoints to initiate and maintain relationships with viewers and guarantee favorable branding outcomes. Lin and colleagues (2016) provide an additional explanation for the observed relationship. In reference to the investment model (Rusbult, 1980), they found that the more viewers actively participate in social TV activities, the greater their satisfaction and investment in the programs they watch. Although viewers may still perceive other programs as attractive, their satisfaction, investment, and perceptions toward alternative programs following social TV participation are predictive in determining their program commitment level. Therefore, our findings correspond with the literature and conclude that viewers' commitment level increases as a consequence of increasing dependence in viewer-program relationships (Rusbult et al., 1998). In addition, our findings reveal that TV program commitment is an important antecedent to network loyalty. By connecting different streams of research, TV program commitment is useful for both broadcasters and academic researchers in understanding how viewers' psychological attachment to programs promotes persistence and relationship maintenance behaviors.

Our findings confirm that social TV participation is positively related to network loyalty (Lewin et al., 2015). Participants who were actively involved in creating and sharing content online showed greater loyalty and advocacy; such a value co-creation process played an integral role in the development of committed relationships (Turri et al., 2013). Therefore, it is important for broadcasters to cultivate a community of viewers through social TV strategies thereby increasing network loyalty (Holland & Baker, 2001; McAlexander et al., 2002). In addition, Chan-Olmsted and Cha (2008) suggested that network loyalty not only contributes to repeated viewing of the channels but also to the potential acquisition of new audiences through favorable word-of-mouth communication. By this token, broadcasters should capitalize on social TV to enhance viewer engagement and transform viewers to ambassadors; in turn, this can help maintain viewing consistency and earn market-winning audience shares (McDowell & Sutherland, 2000). This study is further evidence that the relationship between social TV participation and network loyalty is partially mediated by TV program commitment. The underlying mechanism of loyalty development observed provides important implications for broadcasters' brand management. Although trends such as audience fragmentation, channel proliferation, and technological advances might diminish the value of a program to its network brand (Chan-Olmsted, 2011), our study supports an enhancement association between the two and shows how social TV may contribute to the differential effects of brand equity on viewer behavior (Keller, 1993). Broadcasters should try to optimize viewers' social TV experience, and strategically promote the emotional dimension of such experience across platforms to generate and consolidate affective bonds with viewers; doing so may ultimately lead to loyalty toward the network brand.

This study explores the antecedents and consequences of social TV participation, providing empirical evidence that adds to the existing knowledge of TV branding

and theory development. Although it makes important contributions to understanding social TV, it is not without limitations. While the survey sample was appropriate for studying viewers' multi-platform, multiscreen TV content consumption, the reasoning behind the observed social TV usage may be difficult to generalize to the overall population (Ruggiero, 2000) because of the nature of self-reported data. Future scholars will benefit from gathering information from different viewer groups. In addition, qualitative interviewing and ethnographic study of virtual communities of social TV participants would help to uncover more complex motivations and the social/psychological antecedents that drive viewer behavior. Moreover, our data were cross-sectional in nature; therefore, no causal relationships could be established among motivations, social TV usage, and TV branding outcomes. More thoughtful designs (e.g., field experiments) should be implemented to confirm the causal relationships assumed in the U&G approach. Future research could also examine the effect of specific social TV strategies on viewers' attitudinal and behavioral responses to determine whether such effects vary across different social TV platforms, how different platforms might best complement each other in responding to viewers' media use habits, and what marketing opportunities exist for broadcasters working with advertisers. It would also be valuable to focus on social TV strategies for specific programs or subgenres, given that different types of programming may lead to diverse motivations for social TV participation and result in the development of different types of viewer-program relationships.

In sum, this study has important theoretical and managerial implications. While social TV strategies have been widely adopted for TV branding, this study extends the existing theoretical underpinnings and offers a conceptual framework to examine the utility of social TV. The framework also provides insight into the mechanism through which viewers' psychological attachment and loyalty toward broadcasters and programs may be developed in the multiscreen world. The findings empirically demonstrate the value of social TV to broadcasters and provide directions to proactively encourage social TV participation, to immerse viewers beyond their viewing experience through social TV strategies, and to build long-term relationships with viewers.

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