Watching sports in pubs as an inspiration for the design of mobile live TV services

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ABSTRACT

Being at the sport event or watching sports in pubs is a fulfilling experience, highly sociable, fun and relaxing. Our aim is to identify issues that are closely connected to watching sports in pubs using field studies and theory of leisure and play and to apply them on mobile TV design. In particular we concentrate on watching live sports on mobile devices.

Categories and Subject Descriptors

General Terms

Design

Keywords

Mobile TV, live sports, user experience, playful experience, social TV

1. INTRODUCTION

Watching TV is for many people a common way of spending leisure time. Stebbins in [1] states a consuming of a television programme as an example of passive entertainment and casual leisure in which "only minimal analysis of or need to concentrate on its content". As long as watching TV is used moderately e.g. to relax, calm down after stressful day it is okay. But in case it starts to influence everyday activities or if people become addicted, it inevitably brings negative consequences: people being antisocial, watching not useful TV content (instead of doing other primary activities), physical inactivity and over weight.

In this paper we focus on different aspects of TV watching. Motivated with social interactive TV increases we look at the TV practices from that perspective and conclude that TV watching is more than passive entertainment or an excuse for boredom and laziness and peculiarly it does not have to be antisocial.

By using today's communications technologies, the viewers can be connected together, even if they are not co-present in the same physical setting. Using this technology, it is possible to see what our friends are watching (e.g. through Facebook status: "Mark is watching Big Brother"), tether the TV content together, or chat (audio/text) about the programme onscreen within the TV image. Off-channel media discussions, over the phone, in SMS conversations, in online forums or chat windows is for many integral part of TV viewing.

In [2] the role of broadcast is redefined: "instead of being a plain consumable, TV content serves as conduit of social interaction i.e. socializing around the content might be more important than the content itself".

Particularly we concentrate on the mobile TV as today's TV practices include viewing TV content on the mobile phone. In [2] mobile social TV is defined as "a form of computer mediated communication which creates a joint mobile TV watching experience". Besides remote joint watching of mobile TV, it is also possible, with larger viewing distances, to share the screen with small groups and it carries more social meaning than watching TV together in a living room, since it requires invitation by the device owner [3] and it is more intimate, cheek to cheek experience [4] (Figure 1). Still, a mobile phone is a personal mobile device and the viewing happens in different contexts, like on the go, in the public space (public transportation, coffee shops, waiting rooms etc.) or in the private space (at home, at work, private car etc.). Each of these environments has their own specific characteristics and consumption scenarios, which differ from the "traditional TV viewing", hence making designing for mobile TV services complex.

Figure 1: Group of friends having dinner and watching together content on the mobile phone

An example of the mobile TV service that we are interested in is the live sport broadcast. Watching sports in arena gives special experience – being there (with your friends or other fans), feeling the atmosphere, cheering or witnessing the (good and bad!) athlete

performance. Similarly, watching sports in pubs and other public places is extremely popular and enjoyable. We think that observing audience's practices in such environments could give us valuable ideas for the design of future mobile live sport TV services.

Next section presents studies that we did in sports bars. In parallel, we turn to relevant theory of leisure and play to support our observations. Section 3 gives design suggestions for live sport watching on mobile phones. We end the paper with the set of questions which we would love to discuss further.

2. WATCHING SPORTS IN PUBS

It is important to study what people *actually* do in front of TV screens to create a design for the environment. Through ethnographic studies in sports bars, we have studied what people *do* through focusing on bodily actions like waving, pointing and touching, together with what people say in conversations, comments on what is happening on the screen and outburst like screaming.

2.1.1 Togetherness

As an audience it is important to time the cheering for a feeling of togetherness. This is also connected to what is happening on the screen. One example from our findings is when a person first celebrates to the screen and then turns to his friends. He also turns to other people in the crowd, not belonging to his group, and cheers (Figure 2). It is obvious that this is a social event, not only affecting the persons you are there with but also everyone at that specific place.
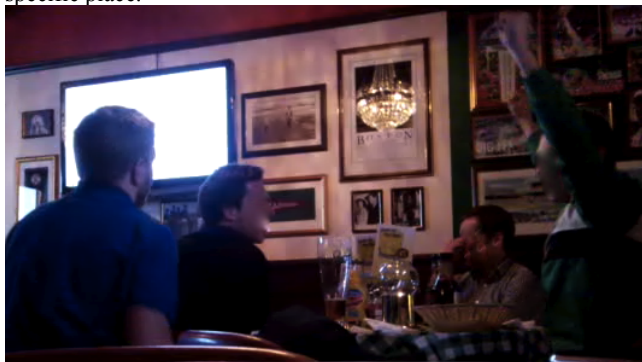

Figure 2: Synchronized cheering. The person to the far right is cheering but none of the others at his table; he then looks at other people in the room

The public and social setting is important in forming a sort of context for viewers' actions. The sports bar environments stimulate a so-called interrupted talk. It is not necessarily a less personal one but it creates a focus on something more than the relationships between the members of the crowd. In a much generalized manner, we could say that this kind of environment makes talk between some easier and between others harder. This interrupted talk is not always predictable since it is not only during the pauses that fans talk. It is somehow reflecting their engagement in the game. On the other hand, physical expressions like waving, pointing and utterances, happens frequently. This is what binds the experience together.

Stebbins in [1] observes *sociable conversation* as one of the types of casual leisure and states "Sociable conversation guarantees the participants maximization of such values as joy, relief, and vivacity; it is a democratic activity in that the pleasure of one person is dependent on that of the other people in the exchange.". A similar phenomenon is visible from our observations. Stebbins further talks about a life cycle of sociable conversation. Applied to watching sports in pubs, it is triggered with the sport event viewing in the pub and/or a group of friends with the same interest for sports. It is maintained by the game/sport and participants' engagement, while the end of game or destructive behavior of crowd destroys it.

In [6], a framework consisting of playful experience categories which should help design interactive products from an experience point of view is given. One of the categories is *fellowship* which is according to authors "Experience of friendship, fellowship, communality or intimacy". In our studies watching sports in pubs was tightly connected to sharing moments with friends.

2.1.2 Immersion

Interaction is taking place, among others, through speaking with the device. We have seen viewers shouting questions to the players (TV). The viewers are thereby interacting with the screen even if it doesn't "give" anything back. Reeves et al. argues that in situations when people are watching TV together, face-to-face interaction might be as important as their individual interaction with the screens i.e. "interaction affects and is affected by spectators" [5]. Another way to interact with the TV is by leaning forward so you get a closer look on what is happening on the screen. This becomes a way to be a part of the action on the screen through an embodied experience. From our video material, we have found that viewers sometimes do physical imitations to what is happening on the screen. One example is a man who starts to wobble back and forth to his left and right side when he is watching an exciting downhill ski competition. This could be seen as an immersive TV-experience.

In the framework proposed in [6], one of the playful categories is *captivation* defined as "Experience of forgetting one's surrounding". It is just what was happening to our observed spectators, which, in some cases, were fully engaged in the game and cheering.

2.1.3 Modalities

Action taking place on a TV screen is a perfect example of how body language and eye contact dramatically change during a game. The movements go from very still to waving arms and shaking heads. This could be viewed as a physical reaction to the understanding of the game. Pointing at the TV screen can be a way of showing that you are dedicated, but also a way to communicate to others what's happening. To understand speed or action is also to understand how to react as a spectator.

Connected to that, Stebbins in [1] states *sensory stimulation* as one of the casual leisure types characterized "with diversity of things and activities, among them creature pleasures, displays of beauty, satisfying curiosity, thrills of movement, and thrills of deviant activity". In the context of watching sports in pubs, people engage in activities where they have drink, eat, or flirt (*creature pleasures*), watch good sport performance (*displays of beauty*), or watch and talk to other people (*satisfy their curiosity*).

Similarly, in the framework proposed in [6], one of the playful categories is *sensation* defined as "Meaningful sensory experience".

3. MOBILE TV DESIGN SUGGESTIONS

In the previous section, we have described our studies on watching sports in pubs and, in parallel, we gave theoretical perspective on obtained key points.

One of the used works is about designing technology for playful experiences [6] and this is what authors state: "Our hypothesis is that playful experiences emerge from interactive products that allow users to have a playful approach while using them", whereas "the term playful characterizes an attitude towards whatever activity one is engaged" as stated in [7]. Except from fellowship, captivation and sensation categories, which we have found as qualities of watching sports in pubs in our observations, there are (at least) two more that could also be applied. *Sympathy* referred to in [6] as "Experience of sharing emotional feelings" which is connected to mass cheering regardless of positive or negative feelings. *Relaxation*, defined in [6] as "Experience of unwinding, relaxation or stress relief. Calmness during play", in a form of engaging in favorite activity, like watching football, is a way for many people to escape everyday boredom or problems.

Other used work is on casual leisure [1]. In that work casual leisure is defined "as immediately, intrinsically rewarding, relatively short-lived pleasurable activity requiring little or no special training to enjoy it". Further on, the author suggests six types of casual leisure: play, relaxation, passive entertainment, active entertainment, sociable conversation, and sensory stimulation, all of which can be combined. Although not directly visible from our observations, for many people watching sports in pubs, alone or with friends, is a way to run away of everyday activities (*relaxation or passive entertainment*).

What follows from so far said is that watching sports in a pub is social, captivating, sensory and relaxing activity. We will next start discussion about the social component of watching sports on mobile TV. We have chosen it because we think it is the most relevant for a mobile device as a TV terminal. Additionally, we raise a question of interacting with mobile TV.

3.1 Social connectivity

TV watching is about fun and entertainment; still it has always been a social experience as we talked about in Introduction. Mobile interactive TV brings new scenarios to social TV. Included is both synchronous and asynchronous communication, with both collocated and distance viewers, as well as with both the same content and different. Activities assumed around it are e.g. sharing common conversational elements, social filtering, choosing program or controlling the content. However, social communication should not distract users from the TV program and its use should be simple and non intrusive.

In designing mobile TV, two challenges that make social interaction (synchronous or synchronously) problematic need to be resolved.

- **Co-located viewers.** By using today's communications technologies, the viewers can be connected together, even if they are not co-present in the same physical setting - the Internet has supported social interaction around viewing in many ways. For this, an interaction channel is needed. The question is how to design it to support co-located viewing and at the same time minimize user annoyances and distraction from the main TV content. Moreover, latency is a critical issue, particularly for real-time communications.

- **Various views on the same event.** Interactive TV and personalization of TV content lead to different viewing practices. People used to, and still ask "did you see this?". With novel interactive TV possibilities, this question changes into "what did you see?"

3.2 Interaction

For TV watching to be relaxing or entertaining activity as it always has been, special care needs to be given to interaction techniques. Besides being simple, intuitive and efficient, it also "Should posses a dimension of fun that makes interaction process captivating" [9].

For mobile TV it is even more important, since mobile phone is used in different contexts and also as a communication device

4. QUESTIONS FOR THE WORKSHOP

Based on the above stated, these are the questions we would like to further explore with the workshop participants:

1. How should social connectivity be designed in order to provide playful experience?

2. In what way interacting with mobile TV could be more fun and less trouble?

3. What else should mobile TV posses in order to be able to trigger playfulness?

4. How to evaluate a playful experience of mobile TV if it is context–dependent and mobile phone is used in various contexts?

5. ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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