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## **Transformations through Twitter: The England riots, television viewership and negotiations of power through media convergence**

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### **Abstract:**

The growth and widespread use of social media is altering the viewing experience for some television audiences quite considerably. Viewers are increasingly integrating social platforms such as Twitter and Facebook into their TV-watching experience to collectively discuss programmes and live TV events as they happen. In sum, viewers are watching television with their laptops or mobile devices at hand, seemingly in an effort to transform their experience into a social, or community event (Makice, 2009). This paper will examine this growing intersecting media landscape of television and social media, considering the consequences of increased audience involvement within this convergence. Analysing the Twitter-led engagement of viewers of Channel 4's 2011 *Street Riots: The Live Debate*, this study illustrates how Twitter is being used by television audiences and networks surrounding the live broadcast of a programme. I show how the viewing audience uses Twitter to express their views on issues within the debate and also on the show itself, the importance of "liveness" (Auslander 2008) and the extended tweeting audience, and how information and knowledge is circulated, in form of "collective intelligence" (Lévy, 1997). I argue that we can see these processes resulting in a change in viewership for many individuals, subsequently influencing the ways in which audience and programmes engage with each other.

**Keywords:** convergence, engagement, social media, television audiences, Twitter,

### **Introduction**

The growth and widespread use of social media is altering the viewing experience for some television audiences quite considerably. Viewers are increasingly integrating social platforms such as Twitter and Facebook into their TV-watching experience to collectively discuss programmes and live TV events as they happen. In sum, viewers are watching television

with their laptops or mobile devices at hand, seemingly in an effort to transform their experience into a social, or community event (Makeice, 2009). In this article, I will examine this growing intersecting media landscape of television and social media, considering the consequences of increased audience involvement within this convergence. Analysing the Twitter-led engagement of live viewers of a Channel 4 televised debate concerning the England riots of August 2011; I will unravel this cultural shift in television viewing, examining how audiences are collectively sharing their thoughts and comments, in synchronisation with the broadcast, and the important role that “liveness” (Auslander 2008) plays within this. In an effort to illuminate this process further and determine its effects on cultural industries, I will explore and question how TV networks and programmes are responding to this practice, through integration with this behaviour and their use of strategies to further engage audiences within this new paradigm. I argue that this collision of social media and television is working as a force of change for viewership, subsequently and powerfully influencing the ways in which audience and programmes engage with each other.

### **Television viewership and social media: from tweet-peats to Question Time**

Since the launch of Twitter in 2006, the social media platform, which allows users to share comments based on 140 characters or less (otherwise known as ‘tweets’) or pictures and links, had, by 2011, underlined its diffusion into popular culture (Arceneaux and Weiss, 2010) by amassing 200 million registered users around the world (Cross, 2011: 51). Within these interactions, and alongside the rise of mobile internet on devices such as the iPhone and BlackBerry, it is now a common occurrence for television viewers to use social media platforms to discuss programmes as they watch, in ‘real time’ (Deller, 2011, Proulx and Shepatin 2012), using themed hashtags for each programme (Naaman, Becker and Gravano, 2011). Indeed, some viewers are congregating on Twitter to actively “interpret, publicly comment on, and debate a television broadcast while they are watching it” (Anstead and O’Loughlin 2011), giving strength to the argument that “in the era of media convergence, including social networking, streaming video, email, blogging, and so forth, the conception that television is synonymous with passivity is no longer tenable” (Jones 2010: 25). Instead of passivity, then, viewers are using their connections through social media to exchange and re-circulate information, engage in discussion and broadcast their views to a mobilised audience. As Wohn and Na argue, “social media is recreating a pseudo “group viewing” experience of television [with people] using Twitter to express themselves... the use of hashtags and re-tweets suggests that although users aren’t directly interacting with specific individuals, they want to be part of a larger group” (2011).

In March 2012 this group engagement of viewers with conversations through technology was given further momentum through being defined as “chatterboxing” by the UK TV Licensing organisation, who conducted a report into British viewing habits. They discovered that over a quarter (26%) of respondents have commented on a programme on a second mobile screen, with nearly one half (46%) being aged under twenty five. Responses from these participants worked to show that “being involved in and following chatterboxing

in the build-up to and during a live programme, is actually becoming part of the viewing experience, and is encouraging people to watch a programme as it is shown on TV” (2012). Thus, this form of viewing is re-shaping the relationship, in some instances, between viewer and programme, in terms of both how it is engaged with, and re-cementing the importance of viewing the live broadcast.

With the popularity of live tweeting during broadcasts increasing as more individuals join Twitter, some TV networks have been attempting to engage and experiment with this “group viewing” practice through the use of cross-media strategies. As Gunn Sara Enli began to observe in 2009, “through innovations based on audience involvement, broadcast media are tapping into the evolving ‘participatory culture’, connecting with the audience at a time when social media increasingly challenge the hegemony of traditional mass media” (2009: 483). For example, the American network Fox attempted to integrate Twitter discussion into their programming in September 2009 by offering what they termed as tweet-peats for episodes of *Fringe* and *Glee*. Allowing viewers to discuss the episodes as they were re-broadcast “live,” cast and crew members also took part and answered questions from tweeters. The responses were then scrolled across the bottom of the screen during the broadcast, so non-tweeting viewers could observe the ongoing discussions as they watched the episodes. However, this strategy was not well received by some viewers, with some pointing out “how ill-suited a Twitter feed was for a television series as it made it impossible to concentrate on the action and took up far too much screen space” (Gillian 2011: 234). Similarly, on the news page for the tweet-peat experiment on GleeFan.com, some viewers posted comments expressing how the inclusion of tweets on the screen had resulted in their inability to continue watching the episode:

hey people the tweet-peat is a little annoying. my family and i are try to wach the show but these tweek-peats are taking up half of the screen. we would like to wach the show so please stop.

get off my screen! i got so annoyed i turned the show off and haven't tuned back in.

Dont ever do that again. I tried to get my bf to watch Glee and the tweets were so distracting he changed the channel after 20 minutes (and he was enjoying the show up to that point). It WAS really annoying. I know some executive thought this was a hip way to merge technologies, but all that innane chatter filling half the screen ruined the episode. <http://gleefan.com/fox-announces-tweet-peats-for-glee/> 31 August 2009

Fans of *Fringe* on major fansites Fringetelevision.com and Fringe-forum.com also expressed similar concerns and complaints, deeming the tweets on the screen as too intrusive (Dybwad 2009). This experiment demonstrated that some viewers prefer to exercise choice

and have “the option to watch their favorite programmes in their own way (and increasingly, in their own time)” (Roco 2009). Thus, following these reactions from viewers, the tweet-peat strategy was not repeated by the network.

In September 2010 NBC also attempted to integrate social media with their broadcasts by launching the Season Two premiere of its programme *Community* with what they termed as a “twittersode.” This event took place in the hour leading up to the episode, thus acting as a prequel (Rabinowitz 2010). Within the “twittersode,” characters tweeted to each other over eighty tweets that collectively formed a scene. However, rather than being broadcast on screen, fans could choose to follow this through the accounts of the fourteen different characters through Twitter or by visiting a micro site created for the show.

Networks have also experimented with tweets by fictional characters. In March 2010, American Cable network Showtime featured a character within the programme *Nurse Jackie* tweeting. These comments then appeared in real time on the character’s Twitter account. (Stelter 2010). ABC’s *Grey’s Anatomy* followed a similar strategy in February 2011 with Dr Bailey tweeting during an episode, which fans could then follow in real time through her official account.

In the United Kingdom, the production company TalkbackThames, which has made shows such as *The X Factor* and *The Apprentice*, has also underlined the considered importance of TV related discussions on Twitter to networks, by employing a social media editor who “curates the social media conversations by adding images and clips and re-posting relevant tweets” (Bulkeley 2011).

Focusing more specifically though on television news and current affairs programmes, there is also a strong use of this practice, by audiences, journalists and programme makers. For example, even though it is not broadcast live, political debate programme *BBC Question Time*, with its official hashtag #bbcqt, is “often the biggest programme in the UK on Twitter” with it regularly inspiring “40,000-50,000 tweets a show” (Manzoor 2012. See also Dee 2010 and Anstead and O’loughlin 2011). Launched in 2009, the Twitter discussions and hashtag have been regularly promoted by the presenter on the programme and have accumulated over 119 thousand followers, by August 2012. The official account @bbcquestiontime “recaps statements made in the programme... [So] followers who aren’t even watching the broadcast can follow and contribute to the debate. It also retweets comments, asks viewers questions and provides links to politicians’ Twitter accounts and websites of interest” (Deller 2011). As the presenter, David Dimbleby observed, Twitter has altered the viewing experience for many, in that it has created “a new format for watching Question Time, where the home audience can argue with each other and with the panel in the same way as the studio audience does” (Manzoor 2012). Thus, seemingly for some viewers, even though they are not present as part of the studio audience, and may not be physically located with other viewers, Twitter has become an important and revolutionary tool with which they can contribute their voice to the debate and vitally be exposed to, or engage in, the exchange of relevant information.

In 2008, online newspapers were argued as approaching “online user participation mainly as an opportunity for their readers to debate current events” with the news process being “closed to citizen involvement or controlled by professional journalists when participation is allowed” (Domingo et al 2008: 326). Although, as I have shown, the importance of online news debate for viewers and readers remains, with news journalism now increasingly focusing on social media as a source of information (Hermdia 2010), a situation has occurred where “news is no longer gathered exclusively by reporters and turned into a story but emerges from an ecosystem in which journalists, sources, readers and viewers exchange information” (Standage 2012). Thus, Twitter has also been embraced by television news programmes and channels, with all UK major news networks engaging in the platform and having their own official accounts, working to encourage debate and discussion from viewers, while simultaneously remaining on alert for any newsworthy information they may provide.

I will now move on to explore this growing practice further, with a case study based on a live debate programme televised in the United Kingdom. This study will question how this “group viewing” activity through Twitter, coupled with the practice of watching television with their laptops or mobile devices at hand, is resulting in a change in viewership for many individuals and modifying the ways in which television networks construct some programmes. As I will illustrate, this process subsequently and powerfully influences the ways in which audiences, programmes and networks engage with each other.

### **Channel 4 Street Riots: The Live Debate**

In August 2011 England experienced a succession of riots and social unrest (Barker 2011, Bridges 2012, Wallace 2012). Beginning in London on 6 August in response to the fatal shooting by police of civilian Mark Duggan in Tottenham, over a number of days the riots spread to other major cities within the country, such as Bristol, Manchester and Birmingham. Culminating in widespread looting, alleged murder and arson, the riots resulted in over one thousand individuals being charged. The events received great attention on social media platforms such as Twitter and Facebook (Srinivasan 2011), with individuals primarily using these tools to distribute news and information (Ball and Lewis 2011). During this week, the integration of social media with television programming became even more apparent. With the main British television channels, BBC One, BBC Three, ITV, SKY and Channel 4 all running TV debates to discuss the riots and their aftermath, all programmes invited viewers to offer their views via Twitter, with a selection being included in the broadcast itself. Broadcast at 8pm on Saturday 13 August, public service television broadcaster Channel 4 transmitted a live debate programme, *Street Riots: The Live Debate*, which demonstrated its commitment to appeal “to the tastes and interests of a culturally diverse society” through programmes of an “educational nature” that work to “exhibit a distinctive character” (<http://www.channel4.com/info/corporate/about/channel-4s-remit>).

This show received much attention via Twitter, becoming the top “trending topic,” which is a term or hashtag that appears in higher frequency over other terms on Twitter during that time. Subsequently, the Twitter audience themselves received much attention during the programme, with tweets read out live on air to guests and the studio audience (which was comprised of 80 people directly involved in the riots), and also shown on a scrolling screen in the studio. I monitored all tweets collected under the themed hashtag of #riotsdebate as the show was broadcast live. I used the application TwapperKeeper to archive all the tweets under this trending topic. This application, which is now known as HootSuite Archives, allows a user to enter a hashtag and retrieve and store in a database all relevant tweets as they happen. Thus, this application was selected due to its ability to secure all these tweets in one database. In total, over the whole day, the trending topic garnered 6,857 tweets. Within this, I examined tweets that were sent during the live broadcast only (a time period of one hour), and those tweeted by the production team in the hours leading up to the broadcast. I searched for all tweets within the corpus that mentioned the terms *Channel 4*, the *presenter and guests* (individual names), *Twitter*, *television/TV*, *government*, *action* and *think*. I also did an additional search to view the reaction towards the poll featured in the programme and examined any links tweeted by viewers. Although a large audience may have viewed the programme on Channel 4 +1, or via C4 OnDemand and personal video recorders, this study aims to specifically explore how live viewers engaged with each other, the programme format and the show producers through the platform of Twitter.

In addition, although Twitter is a public space and users can view tweets of any other user, as long as their account is not locked, I have refrained from including any usernames, to protect the identities of those involved. I will now highlight three key themes from these interactions that display the manner in which the engagement between live audience and programmes is being changed through live discussion on Twitter. Namely: the expression of views on issues within the debate and also on the show itself, the importance of “liveness” (Auslander 2008) and the extended tweeting audience, and the circulation of information and knowledge, in form of “collective intelligence” (Lévy, 1997). As I will show, power relations between network and online audiences are being contested and re-negotiated, with viewers able to instantly question and challenge programme makers, as the show is broadcast.

### **Expression of views: debate versus programme**

Within the tweets from individuals watching *Street Riots: The Live Debate*, there appeared two key strands in terms of opinions and views being expressed: a focus concerning issues within the debate and another resting on the composition of the debate and programme itself. Within these expressions, power negotiations between programme producers and viewers that are enhanced by Twitter begin to emerge.

Firstly, viewers frequently posted tweets discussing issues within the debate, offering their opinions, ideas and solutions as guests gave theirs:

- #riotsdebate when is the government going to start investing money into rebuilding communities & facilities for youths, instead of wars!!!
- #RiotsDebate tough action must be taken to enforce the implications criminal actions. Politicians must not worry about popularity.
- #riotsdebate I think you should use violence in self defence. I wouldnt let my house or shop be looted without using self defence!
- #RiotsDebate Ian Duncan Smith is right, children need to be taught the difference between right and wrong

Secondly, while these exchanges of ideas were taking place, others simultaneously made critical comments on the composition and content of the programme itself. When Channel 4 announced in the programme and on Twitter that “56% of people would use violence to defend their property finds exclusive C4 poll” some viewers immediately asked the network for additional information:

- #riotsdebate what was the number of people polled please. We need this to understand the context of your results.
- #riotsdebate again: what was the sample size of your poll please?
- #RiotsDebate - Channel 4 Poll: 56% of people would use violence to protect their property. No mention of numbers asked. Pretty low figure...  
When the poll details did emerge, users then questioned the validity of the findings, due to what was perceived as a low sample size:
- Don't focus on your poll Krishnan, it was only 2000 people. My school has more than that and I wouldn't listen to half of them.
- I don't believe channel 4 poll correct 80 percent of the studio audience think the cause of the riot is in quality #RiotsDebate

Thus, rather than accepting the findings of the programme, viewers can challenge and question, highlighting errors by the network and producers of the debate. Although viewers may have had similar concerns when watching without Twitter, the platform now allows them to instantly contact the programme network and presenters, while simultaneously making fellow tweeting viewers aware. For example, others criticised the presenting style and treatment of the guests:

- whats the point in krishan guru murthy asking questions if he doesnt actually listen to the answer. he just talks over them! #riotsdebate
- @krishgm Sorry but few allowed to finish comments before rushing on to next half comment tried to cram to much into it! #debacle

While for other tweeters the lack of female representation on the panel proved a great disappointment:

- Watching the @channel4 #riotsdebate - why are there no women on the panel?
- @channel4news #riotsdebate shame the panel could not have been more balanced with 'real' people: that were present at the riots or members
- If we do not incorporate the voices of those who did the riots into the #riotsdebate what will we really learn?

The tweet concerning the lack of women on the panel was subsequently retweeted and re-circulated by users. After the show had aired, its presenter, Krishan Guru-Murthy tweeted from his personal account and acknowledged the criticisms from tweeters by admitting: “Yes there should have been more women. We really tried. We had last minute panel change last night after a woman pulled out”. Channel 4 news then re-circulated this by retweeting it from their Twitter account. Criticisms on his presenting style were also replied to by the presenter, with him admitting to one user that “that kind of format - with so many people who want and should speak - is more breadth than depth. agree can be frustrating”.

When the Channel 4 news official Twitter account posted an erroneous and misleading quote from one of the studio guests in the debate, users soon replied, pointing out their mistake:

- #riotsdebate Twilight Bey, youth worker from US: eviction worked in LA  
The network then posted a correction and directed viewers to this amended tweet:
- Correction: Twilight Bey: eviction been going on for many years in LA resulting in kids as young as 6 months forced to live on the street.

Thus, viewers discussing the show via Twitter are able to illicit an immediate response from the network, displaying the power that a mobilised audience is able to wield in this environment over media producers. As Gunn Sara Enli observes, viewers often grasp and welcome the opportunity when they are offered the chance to engage with media programmes through a particular platform. However, “in return, the audience expects recognition by the broadcaster expressed as a certain degree of influence on programming” (2009: 490). Twitter has allowed for this possibility to be taken further, with, as evident with *Street Riots: The Live Debate*, some programme producers and presenters actively using the medium to connect with their audience, even while the show is being aired. In these instances, there are clear power negotiations that are occurring between both parties, with the tweeting viewers using the potential immediacy, directness and collective power of the social media platform to their advantage.

### **“Liveness” and the extended audience: inclusion through Twitter**

Another theme apparent within discussions by the tweeting viewership focused on their inclusion within the programme as an extended part of the “live” studio audience. This theme was also seemingly deemed important by the producers of the programme. Before the broadcast of the show, a Channel 4 news producer tweeted photos of the empty set, alerting viewers on Twitter that the “studio was just about ready,” so they should start to consider the issues that were about to be debated. The producer tweeted again during the airing of the programme, sending viewers “twitpics” of the “Twitter nerve centre” and also a view from the gallery in the studio. Other attempts were also made to increase interest from a tweeting audience with posts such as: “just had 1st rehearsal. Studio looking great” and “We're less than an hour away from #RiotsDebate on C4. What caused the riots? What action should be taken now? Tweet us using the hashtag.” These tweets simultaneously work as commercials for the programme and, alongside the use of selected tweets within the show, act as strategies to integrate Tweeters further into the debate through encouraging them to feel a powerful part of the live build up and production.

This practice by programme producers then, could be interpreted as working to re-instil the importance of “liveness” (Auslander 2008) when viewing a programme, with this being determined as “a relationship of simultaneity” (Auslander 2002: 210) that occurs between an audience and a live event. With the advent of DVD box sets, Internet viewing platforms such as iPlayer and 4OnDemand, catch-up channels and Personal Video Recorders, in recent years a more fragmented viewing audience has been evident than previously known, with a subsequent reduction in the frequency of collective live viewing audiences surrounding television programmes. However, as Auslander has acknowledged, “the idea of liveness is a moving target, a historically contingent concept whose meaning changes over time and is keyed to technological development” (2008: xii). This is evident within the case of tweeting viewing practices, where the technology is offering strong opportunities and purpose for audiences to watch programmes during the live broadcast rather than at a later hour or date.

Although there are services, such as GetGlue, that allow users to announce through social media platforms the programme they are currently viewing (including repeats or shows on DVD), watching a show live now has added value over later viewing for those who wish to partake in airing their observations to a mass Twitter audience and engage in this form of “group” viewing. As Twitter CEO Dick Costolo recently observed about the television programme *Glee*: “When [the show] starts, the moment it airs for the first time... the tweets per second for *Glee* shoot up... They stay up there at a super high level... until the moment the show ends and then they drop... People feel like they have to watch the show while it's going on because the community is tweeting about the show... so [they need to] watch it in real time” (Swisher 2011). This prospect is also being utilised by programme producers, who may see the importance in captivating an extended live audience that will also result in a strong impact for the programme online. For example, as well as tweeting updates to viewers in the build-up to transmission, *Street Riots: the Live Debate* itself featured selected

tweets read out on air, while a scrolling screen in the studio displayed the live blog. The blog, contained on the Channel 4 website, featured the official updates from the network, interspersed by selected tweets from viewers who were posting about the show and using the #riotsdebate hashtag.

Away from the blog, the un-moderated tweeting audience engaged in discussing the debate expressed an awareness of their positioning as an extended audience of the programme, with some professing pleasure when their tweet was read out live on air during the debate:

- i wanna see my twitter on tv TWITTER #riotsdebate
- #RiotsDebate I'm on T.V Woooo!
- #riotsdebate I'm on tv
- #riotsdebate haha my tweet comes up on tv!

However, others expressed cynicism and suspicion over the strong role and inclusion of the online audiences in the debate and suggested that the network had strategically used Twitter to further the popularity of the programme:

- Can't help but think #riotsdebate is a TV show created for twitter reaction.  
#C4
- Channel 4 probably only care about the fact that their #riotsdebate is trending number 1 in the UK.
- I get a feeling tv debate show panelists are chosen more as a catalyst for ratings before purpose. #riotsdebate

The above tweets display a perception of the power of the television network and situate Channel 4 as focused on financial gain, ratings figures, and online impact, taking precedence over the stimulation of discussion and development within the televised debate. This could be one danger when networks seek to capitalise on engagement with the mass online audience: if conducted excessively, and targeting viewers with seeming calculation, it could be viewed by a number of these individuals as a strategic device to secure popularity and coverage within this platform.

### **Collective Intelligence: The selection and circulation of information and knowledge**

The third theme this study wants to highlight how Tweets surrounding the live debate involved the circulation of information and knowledge, which seemingly works to engage some of the audience into the beginnings of a process of “collective intelligence” (Lévy, 1997). This can take the form of links to articles, news items, and various other facts relating to the debate that were felt would inform not only fellow viewers, but also other citizens on

Twitter. For example, throughout the programme, some users, as well as the Channel 4 official account, tweeted quotes from participants in the studio debate, seemingly selecting what they believed to be important sound bites:

- Iain Duncan Smith "we have to change their culture...before the age of three" #riotsdebate
- Hillary Benn "am more interested in seeing people recompensing for what they have done." #riotsdebate

These were then re-circulated to tweeters reading the themed hashtag, in an effort to distribute relevant quotes from the debate to the mass Twitter audience, including those not viewing the show (as one user tweeted: "still haven't watched #riotsdebate picking up what was said via tweets :-P"). Others also posted information they felt fellow tweeters should be made aware of, in light of the debate:

- Will anyone mention Deputy Prime Minister Nick Clegg's conviction on two counts of #arson at the age of 16? #ukriots #riotsdebate #hypocrisy
- #RiotsDebate Just like to point out that the average age of the rioters was 23, the majority of teenagers are NOT thugs.

Articles relevant to the issues surrounding the riots that were being debated were also tweeted and re-circulated in order to further inform the viewership:

- This article was published 3 years ago but I think it's 100% relevant to UK riots 2011. <http://t.co/FTdqrGy> #foodforthought #riotsdebate

While others circulated petitions surrounding issues arising as a result of the riots:

- #Riotsdebate: Cameron's social media censorship would be a damaging response, petition here: <http://t.co/ANZWEyd> #censorship

The above tweet, surrounding Prime Minister David Cameron's announcement to consider blocking social media during periods of crisis, was re-tweeted by other users a total of twenty one times during the broadcast, demonstrating how viewers can use the platform to virally spread information in an attempt to instigate action from a potentially mass audience mobilised around a television programme.

Pierre Lévy in his concept of the "cosmopedia" proposed a utopian vision of a "knowledge space" that generates a "collective intelligence" that is "universally distributed" (1997: 13). The premise for this proposal was formed on "the possibilities made accessible to us through computer technology for the representation and management of

knowledge..." (1997: 216). The cosmopedia would work to "make available to the collective intellect all of the pertinent knowledge available to it at a given moment" and also function "as a site of collective discussion, negotiation, and development..." (1997: 217).

These examples of information and knowledge circulation to other viewers of the programme as it is aired live can be viewed as attempts to engage in a process of "collective intelligence," which is "constantly enhanced, coordinated in real time, and resulting in the effective mobilization of skills" (Lévy, 1997: 13). As Henry Jenkins argues, a "collective intelligence" is held together not by "the possession of knowledge-which is relatively static, but the social process of acquiring knowledge-which is dynamic and participatory..." (2006: 54). The beginnings of this social process, then, can arise within the intersecting media landscape of television and Twitter, and could be interpreted as one of the direct consequences of increased audience involvement within this convergence.

### **Discussion and Conclusion**

This study, focusing on Channel 4's 2011 *Street Riots: The Live Debate*, illustrates how Twitter is being used by television audiences and networks surrounding the live broadcast of a programme. I show how the viewing audience uses Twitter to express their views on issues within the debate and also on the show itself, the importance of "liveness" (Auslander 2008) and the extended tweeting audience, and how information and knowledge is circulated, in form of "collective intelligence" (Lévy, 1997). I argue that we can see these processes resulting in a change in viewership for many individuals, subsequently influencing the ways in which audience and programmes engage with each other. As Wohn and Na argue: "Social media is recreating a pseudo "group viewing" experience of television... Although television viewers aren't communicating directly with each other while they are viewing, the use of hashtags and re-tweets suggests that [users] want to be part of a larger group" (2011).

In alignment with this, relations of power between television networks and online audiences are also being contested and re-negotiated through the social media platform, with viewers able to instantly question and challenge programme makers, as the show is broadcast. In sum, the importance and increasing use of social media alongside television viewership and its effects on the relationship between viewers and programme makers raises two quite pressing areas for consideration. Firstly, in terms of television networks, in what direction will this lead? As William Bulkeley has observed, "carriers, networks, and content producers hope that making it easier for viewers to link up with friends will help them hold on to their audiences... And opening TV to social networking could make it easier for companies to provide personalized programming" (2010). Networks then, may seek to capitalise on tweeting audiences in order to improve ratings and discover the latest talked about, or "trending," topics.

Secondly, as audiences become more immersed in the collision of television and Twitter, the power relations between tweeting viewers and programme makers may be negotiated even further. As I have shown in this article, mobilised audiences can instantly

challenge television networks during a broadcast and produce a response and immediate action. As more viewers reach for their mobile internet devices as they watch a programme to broadcast their thoughts via Twitter, we may witness an even deeper struggle for power between audience and media than is evident at present.

### **Biographical note:**

Lucy Bennett is the co-founder and co-chair of the Fan Studies Network. She graduated with a PhD in online fandom at JOMEC, Cardiff University, with a thesis focusing on online R.E.M. fans. She currently lectures in digital cultures at Cardiff Metropolitan University. Her research examines audiences and their use of the internet, with particular focuses on fandom, music and social media. Her work appears in the journals *New Media & Society*, *Transformative Works and Cultures*, *Social Semiotics* and *Continuum* and she is guest editing a special section of *Participations* on music and audiences. Contact: [bennettlucyk@gmail.com](mailto:bennettlucyk@gmail.com).

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