Chapter 3.6

From 2BeOn Results to New Media Challenges for Social (i)TV

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ABSTRACT

This chapter focuses on traditional and emergent challenges for the Social (i)TV area focusing on explaining the development and evaluation of one of the first Social iTV prototypes and looking at the challenges new media is introducing to this research field. The authors begin by explaining the conceptualization, development and evaluation process of the 2BeOn system and continue with the most important results from it's evaluation with a particular focus on the results that can be important when developing any Social iTV platform. In the last part of the chapter recent developments in the broadcast of TV and Audiovisual content, namely considering the Internet as a medium, are addressed. In this scope authors propose a categorization of emergent online distribution platforms along with a set of social activities users perform on those platforms. Taking in consideration some of the challenges surrounding the presented scenario the chapter ends with the conceptualization of UMCA, a system that could increase social interaction activities performed during the consumption of online AV/TV content.

SOCIAL (I)TV: PROGRESSES AND CHALLENGES

Interactive television platforms that promote services aimed to support socialization practices around TV viewing, acting as a kind of "social glue" (Light, 2004), are at the core of Social (i)TV research (Harboe, 2007). Despite the introduction of the first iTV systems with real time communication services being considerably recent, it is interesting to notice that a considerable amount of research as been done in this area. Since the year 2000, with AOLTV being the first commercial iTV system integrating an In-

stant Messaging service (Kawamoto, 2000), there have been a number of iTV conceptual models, prototypes and systems that enriched this concept adding user awareness in relation to what others are watching. This type of presence/information, besides enabling a feeling of togetherness, opens up several interaction possibilities among users of an established social network: a user can alert his buddies to something interesting that is on air or simply peep at what others are watching and start a conversation based on a common TV content, no matter their geographical location. In this context, numerous developments have emerged, such as: 2BeOn—University of Aveiro (Abreu, 2002); Reality IM—Accenture Labs (Chuah, 2002); Amigo TV—Alcatel (Coppens, 2004); Social TV—PARC (Kharif, 2005), Social Software - described by Coates (2005); ConnecTV—TNO (Boertjes, 2007); CollaboraTV—AT&T (Harrison, 2007); Find-A-Friend - University of Siegen (Heß, 2007); Living@room—CSP (Andrea, 2007).

However, even with this considerable number of prototypes, applications and related research, there are still a lot of open questions, being Social (i)TV far from a fully explored area. In the following sections, and based on the experience gained with the 2BeOn prototype, some answers to the following topics are addressed:

1. Considering the different sociability practices promoted by television viewing, what are the communication, presence and content sharing services for a suitable mediation of those activities in an iTV system?
2. As the interface design of a Social iTV application is a central piece to achieve its' proposes, what are the fundamental issues in this domain?
3. How to evaluate a Social iTV application in order to find out if there is a correlation between users' digital literacy and: (a) learning curve; (b) the suitability of the application to support and promote interaction between viewers allowing an increase of the

communication frequency; (c) the users' wish to make use of such an application.

Taking into account the ever-increasing sociability practices that arise from the current use of AV (audiovisual) distribution platforms (for both PC and mobile based devices), this chapter also focuses on the techno-social context in which users are currently sharing AV content and interacting through it.

THE 2BEON SYSTEM

The 2BeOn system was conceptualized, prototyped and evaluated with one main goal: to support and promote interaction between viewers, enabling an increase of communication and sociability practices (Abreu, 2007). Users involved in the evaluation of the prototype were not restricted to members of an existent social network (e.g. friends or family members), since viewers that did not know each other but that were in tune with the same TV content were also considered.

As stated by Gray (1992) *"A very important part of the pleasure of television serials is to gossip about them the following day."* (Gauntlett, 1999, p.128). In this context and in parallel with its main goal, 2BeOn aims to capitalize the TV ability to induce conversations, strengthen sociability practices and enable a new form of TV enjoyment in a virtual, nevertheless collective, viewing environment.

Conceptualization Process

The conceptualization process of this application was based on a theoretical framework[1] (mainly centred on sciences and technologies of communication) in order to define a set of functional requirements needed to support viewers' social practices. These include commenting, criticizing or gossiping about TV content, in real time or after the broadcast (Dahlgren, 1995); warning

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