

Flexible Services

Social Video Social Viewing of Sports –pilot

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Table of Contents

Table of Contents	2
Tables and Figures	2
List of Tables	2
1 Introduction	3
2 System description – features	5
2.1 Chat	5
2.2 Channels	5
2.3 Inviting	5
2.4 Video	5
2.5 Site	6
2.6 Not implemented features	6
3 Field Test, Test Users and Methods	7
4 Results	8
4.1 Acceptance of Service	8
4.2 Usability	8
4.3 Chat as a Communication Channel	9
4.4 Experiences of Social Viewing	13
4.5 Suitable Genres for Sharing	13
4.6 Small and Private Web TV Communities	15
4.7 A value added feature?	17
5 Conclusion	18
6 References	19

Tables and Figures

List of Tables

1. Table: Typology of chat conversation during group online video viewing sessions.
12

List of Figures

1. Figure. Example figure of the service6

1 Introduction

Watching television and videos has traditionally been a social activity. In the past families and friends watched same program on the same television set and talked about it with their colleagues at work the very next day. They could be certain that most people had seen the same program. Due to fragmentation of media environment this is no longer the case. There are an increasing number of TV sets and media devices at home, hundreds of channels and services and audiences have scattered. Peoples' program choices have become more individualistic and privatization of media experience has increased. (Gauntlett & Hill 1999; Graeme & Jinna 2009)

However, there are signs that internet is able to bring this kind of *social or collaborative viewing* back to peoples' lives - the term referring to practices that enable multiple users to aggregate from multiple sources and view videos together in a synchronized viewing experience (Shamma et al. 2007). So far many social media video services are to be watched alone and services do not support synchronous social conversation (Burgess & Green 2009; Stauff 2009). However, there are a growing number of web sites for social viewing and attempts to make social viewing in the center of online video experience. Typically these sites like CBS Social TV1, platforms like View2gether2 and streaming video locales such as Justin.tv3 involve chat functions, polls etc. to create a common viewing experience. For example social virtual living rooms of CBS enable people sit and watch their favorite shows together and discuss them as they play out. Some experiments have been very successful. For example about 13.5 million viewers gathered together to watch the series finale of Lost – instead of just watching the episode viewers were commenting it actively.4

Similar concepts have designed to Facebook, which is a world's largest social network. Live Stream Box enables users to watch streaming video event and chat while it is happening, see their comments alongside the video and in their Facebook profile. Application was first tested during Barack Obama's presidential election. Online videos and web television are seen to be perfect vehicles for bringing the idea of social television viewing back to mainstream.

According to study of Parks Associates (2009) young adults find chatting with others who are watching the same television show one of most interesting social media features also in traditional television.

The goal of this study was to create a social viewing service that supports communication and social interaction while viewing online videos and web

¹ http://www.cbs.com/social_tv/

² <http://www.view2gether.com/>

³ <http://www.justin.tv>

⁴ http://blogs.imediaconnection.com/2010/5/24/-Social-Viewing--In-Action---Lost--Finale-Attracts-13-5-Million-Viewers---And-Half-A-Million-Tweets_1424.aspx

television. We wanted to examine how the co-viewing experience is created e.g. through a chat feature. Are people able to achieve the feeling of togetherness like they were watching the program alongside a group of friends if they are able chat with each other while viewing?

Social viewing features were tested first and foremost with sports enthusiasts. Internet has long been a significant outlet for sport and sports consumption has increasingly shifted online, although internet sites and social media is not replacing traditional sports journalism but more like supplementing it (Turtiainen 2010; Stauff 2009). According to Purcell (2010) sports is one of the most popular online video content. In 2009 over 30 % of American online video consumers had watched sports videos and 15 % of them had also uploaded videos of sports events they have attended. Sport videos are especially consumed by male online video viewers. (Purcell 2010) In former social television studies sport events have also been mentioned as well suited to share and suitable for social viewing (Baillie et al. 2007; Oehlber et al. 2006) That is quite natural because sports has a strong dependence on the sociable context, sports provoke emotions and there are huge amount of active sport enthusiasts around the globe who want to get and share their sports news and experiences right away with others. Online videos provide sports fans opportunity for niche content, extreme or regional sports videos as well as highlights of mainstream sport events. Sports fans use YouTube mainly to view again significant sports performances. (Stauff 2009) Because of this special nature of sports viewing, it is presumable that people would be interested to share sports videos as a real-time experience.

In this study we concentrated especially to following research questions:

1. Is text chat a convenient form of communication when creating a social viewing experience?
2. Is it a value adding feature for web broadcasts and online videos?
3. Is chat supporting the co-viewing experience and feeling of togetherness among people who are viewing?
4. What content and genres are suitable to this kind of shared viewing?
5. What kind of conversation shared viewing is promoting?

2 System description – features

Service was created that allowed users to watch live and prerecorded television shows together over the internet. Users could interact with each other while watching the video streams via chat interface. Users could setup their own chat channels and invite their friends to join the channels in various different ways. Every channel had its own video stream so everyone on the same channel was viewing the same video stream together.

2.1 Chat

First users had to choose nickname they want to use in the service. After this they could start chatting. Chat messages allowed use of basic emoticons in addition to normal text. Messages were sent simply by typing the message and pressing enter or clicking send. Users could also use action messages with '/me' command. In example '/me waves to all' would be shown in chat as '* nickname waves to all' in different text style than the normal chat.

2.2 Channels

There were three kinds of channels in the service which all shared the same functionality with some exceptions.

- *Default channel* where all user joined after entering nickname if they weren't coming through an invitation link. In this users could watch the default broadcast and chat. They could also look for other users to setup their own channel with.
- *Public user channels* were user created channels. Channel creator could set the video stream that was shown to all users on that channel. Creator could also invite more users to the channel and can remove users from that channel.
- *Private user channels* worked the same way as public channels except users were required to enter the channel password before entering the channel.

Channel creation was done by and clicking the channel creation button and typing the desired channel name and in case of private channel the password. After this, user was automatically moved to the newly created channel.

2.3 Inviting

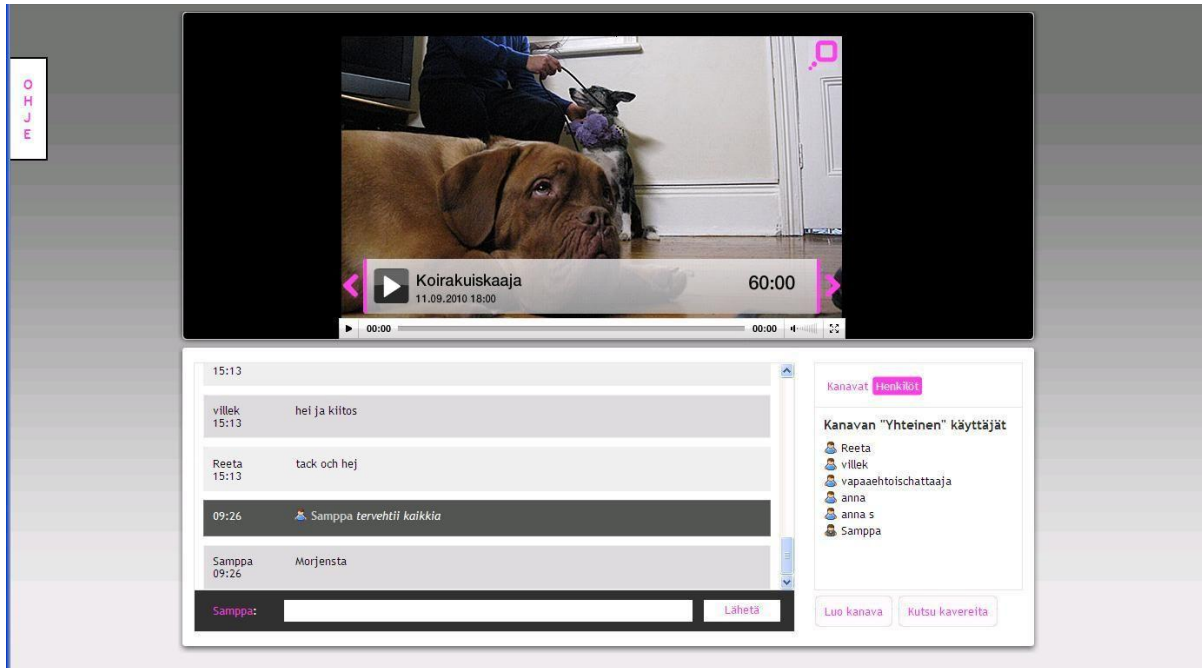
Users could invite their friends to their own created channels or to the default channel in three different ways: via email, direct URL links or Facebook. When the receiving user clicked the received invitation he/she was forwarded to the channel that the invitation originated from.

2.4 Video

Video stream was shown using a Flash based player. Video stream source was live television broadcast or pre-recorded broadcast. Video stream used was basic RTMP-stream.

2.5 Site

Service was hosted as a normal web page so it could be viewed with all the latest browsers that supported Flash and have Javascript and cookies enabled. This way it could be used on many different platforms including Windows, Linux and Mac OSX.



1. Figure. Example figure of the service

2.6 Not implemented features

Due to time schedule and technical problems some of the designed features were left out from the pilot.

One of the biggest features that were not implemented was ability for users to select and start streams from pre-recorded shows. The idea was that users could select a video from a list of available videos and start it on their own channel for viewing with their invited friends. This was left out because technical difficulties in starting simultaneous live streams. In the pilot service providers started all the streams.

Other relevant feature that was left out was integration with Facebook calendar. This would have allowed users to agree in advance when to watch videos.

3 Field Test, Test Users and Methods

Before field test, two groups of people (12 subjects) were interviewed to gain knowledge about users' expectations and acceptance of the general concept of the service.

Four people were invited for the actual field test and they were asked to invite two to four of their friends to participate. In the field test there were 14 test users altogether. Test sample corresponded to relatively young target group because online videos are most popular among younger adults less than 30 years (Madden 2007 & 2009). Test users were 17 to 37 years old, average age was 26. There were five women, nine men.

On average the testers were all relatively active web users, who approximately spent 2.5 hours per day in internet. Most of them used web at home. They were familiar with online videos and web television: 11 out of 14 users watched online videos like YouTube at least once a week and web television at least twice a month or so. They were not watching traditional television so much: only five of them viewed TV every day, six said that they watch television every week. Test users have also produced some social media content. They were mostly participating web communities like Facebook – nine out of 14 said that they visit Facebook at least once every day. Nine out of 14 had shot and uploaded their own videos. One test user was even a very active video producer, who uploaded videos every week.

Field test was carried out between 23.4.-10.5.2010. In order to understand what makes social viewing enjoyable, we invited participants to watch various programs together:

1. Two ice hockey enthusiasts were watching *Ice Hockey SM final game* at VTT usability lab. Their friends were participating at their home. Hockey game was live stream and lasted about two hours.
2. One dog lover viewed *Cesar Milan Dog Whisperer* show at the location of Tampere University. Her friends participated at their home. Program was a prerecorded video that was switched on by service providers and lasted about 40 minutes.
3. Fourth person was watching *Maria! -talk show* at the location of Tampere University. Her friends participated at their work place. Program was a prerecorded video and lasted about 45 minutes.

In expectation interviews people mentioned different genres that could suit to social television viewing, so we chose, not only sports for the actual field test, but also a modern Finnish talk show "Maria!" and a video for dog enthusiasts.

The person who was in the lab with the researcher invited his friends by email to participate. The time was set in advance.

User behavior and comments during the hockey night at VTT usability lab was video-captured. Other tests were observed by the researcher. All test users filled a background information form and were interviewed with the semi-structured interview form after the test. Also their chat discussion was captured and read in depth afterwards.

4 Results

4.1 Acceptance of Service

In the expectations interviews, most participants were interested in an application which enables them to chat and view online videos or ongoing web broadcast at the same time. *According to them the basic idea of the service was believable.*

They pointed out that viewing television/ video is still a social activity, no matter what the device is. Some single people estimated that they watch less traditional television because of lack of companion. They also brought out that there is already social interaction around television programs and online videos: people utilize various devices and interfaces at hand; they talk about videos in web forums, share YouTube links in their Facebook profiles and send SMS-messages while viewing. TV programs and videos provide conversation topics for both men and women. Current media environment of user-generated content cherish the opportunity to express opinions and communicate with others, and this effects also viewing of television and videos. So it is no longer passive, "lean back" consumption like traditional television viewing has often described to be (cf. Casey 2002), but more active and committed (Schatz et al 2008).

"There was a Eurovision Song Contest going. And I wrote all the time in Facebook. Especially that kind of program you need to share with someone. – Someone had updated his FB status and there started a conversation where all people participated and I didn't even know them. But we all wrote comments - real time comments." woman, 29 yrs.

4.2 Usability

Unfortunately there were technical problems that could not be solved while testing the service. During the live stream ice hockey night the server fell down, the service mixed nicknames, users had to sign in every five minutes, the player stopped occasionally if people were typing comments etc. During the Dog Whisperer show and "Maria!" there were problems with audio track delays.

- 13 out of 14 users thought that technical problems disturbed the field test and problems had an effect on chat and discussion, which dealt with those problems to a great degree, especially during the ice hockey game.

However, if we forget the major technical difficulties and evaluate the usability of the service, test users thought that service as such was easy to use and testers

very quickly learned how to use it. They noticed different channel alternatives (private/ public), could sign in easily and send invitations to their friends.

Some of them hoped improvement with design of the screen and chat:

- 9 out of 14 users thought that video screen should have been bigger compared to chat and
- 6 out of 14 wished that chat comment line where you type should have been longer.

"If you were chatting and typing, you only saw the lower part of the video and had to scroll up and down." woman, 30 yrs.

"You could not see whole sentences when you were writing." woman, 32 yrs.

4.3 Chat as a Communication Channel

An interesting research question was about chat as a communication channel: is typing a convenient way of communication and can online video viewers reach the experience of co-viewing if they chat while watching the program.

In general chat was considered relatively easy way to communicate:

- 13 out of 14 users found chatting as such easy.

They did not find chatting to online videos as artificial or unpleasant (only four of them did) and did not get tired of typing during the test.

However, distraction from the program was an evident problem:

- Eight users said that chatting disturbed their viewing to some degree.

They were missing things on the screen because of typing and scrolling between the screen and chat. That was partly a problem of service design, but reading and typing clearly drew a viewer's focus away from the video.

When observing the viewers, it seemed that programs provoked lots of emotions (laughter, irritation etc.) and users very often started to write something but stopped because someone else did it first or the situation passed. Video stream is always moving on which easily prohibits long conversations and comments were often pretty short.

"If you discussed something seriously, you missed the show immediately." woman, 30 yrs.

The youngest of test users (17-18 years or so old) had less problems with chat and multitasking. Many young media users are described as multitaskers; they have simultaneous skills and don't have to divide their attention between different actions (cf. Foehr 2006; Lankshear & Knobel 2006).

Some test users (six) supposed that audio / voice chat might have been better channel for real time communication. They thought that talking would be more fast, direct and somehow natural or authentic than typing. Audio chat didn't get unlimited approval though – eight users doubted that two audio sources would have been too much and hard to listen at the same time – people do not easily process two audio signals at once. They wondered if a voice chat would be impossible to use in mobile contexts like in public transports. (cf. Schatz et al. 2008) Some were also thinking if audio chat would draw away their attention from the video even more than text chat. This is not necessarily the case - Weisz and Kiesler (2008) who have compared audio and text chats while watching online videos have found out that actually both chats are equally distracting if the video contains dialogue. Despite the distraction their study participants found chatting to videos as enjoyable.

Test users' chat discussion was captured and read in dept after the field test. All groups of friends wrote approximately three to four comments per minute throughout the test. Excluding ice hockey viewers, chat conversation went ahead smoothly: there were natural breaks like there would be if people were viewing traditional television together, but no extremely long silences. Conversation was not particularly more active in the beginning of the test, like it often is in test situations, but continued throughout the test. Ice hockey viewers were not as active as the others due to technical difficulties. They wrote as many comments per minute as others but there were seven ice hockey fans typing in one public channel compared to other groups of three and four people.

Chat discussions were read in depth by using typology of comments created by Oehlbert et al. (2006) in their ethnographic study of television watching in groups, which worked well also in this study. In that study researchers noticed that people usually use five types of comments when viewing television programs together:

1. Content-based comments which directly refer to the shown content.
2. Context-based comments which are relevant to the show, but not necessarily to the episode or moment that is viewed.
3. Non-sequitur comments which are not related to programs, they are social exchanges such as asking something about one's family.
4. Logistical comments which are relevant to watching experience such as asking to adjust volume.
5. Phatic responses which are almost involuntarily reactions like laughter, groans etc. Although they don't convey relevant information, they may be vital for the the social atmosphere and mediate participation of other users.

Logistical comments, in this study comments about technical difficulties, dominated clearly the sports viewing event. There were also short, reactive commenting about the ongoing game and some context-based commenting – users shared their inside information as ice hockey enthusiasts about future player choices.

"Maria!" show encouraged quite ironic content-based discussion which dealt mostly with the show and its bad guest choices. Compared to other groups of dog and sport enthusiasts who knew what the program was about to present, this group did not know what is going to happen in the show. They were neither fans of any kind. So, it is quite understandable that the entertaining magazine program provoked conversation which pretty much was content-based.

Conversation about Cesar Milan show was perhaps the most versatile one. Dog Whisperer generated content-based discussion which dealt with the program, training methods of Milan but test users also wrote context-based comments about their own experiences and everyday practices as dog enthusiasts. These "*side-discussions*" did not seem to disturb the test users – on the contrary, the group of dog lovers was more active than three other groups and their comments were also longest ones, phatic comments were rare. Dog enthusiasts were pretty close friends and also wrote few non-sequitor comments, which are usually more common in groups who already have tight social connection with each other.

Type of comments	Examples from the data		
	Hockey game	Maria!	Dog Whisperer
Content-based	Joonas: Uglyy.. Joonas: Why this cyclops is wearing a mask? Sampsis: oh oh oh, that was ugly.. Joonas: Becomes a fight.. Pekka: Who is doing what?? Joonas: Idiot Sampsis: I don´t know Sampsis: What´s happening Pekka: People in Turku are rotten	Anna: who is this? Ree: hey he is Obama´s guy Vapaaehtoischattaaja: Yeah, but really Anna: and what is he doing in this show with that dog?? -- ville: didn´t we agree that he is doppelganger of Kevin Barnhurst Anna: looks like him Anna: a little more tank though Ree: he´s american ambassador and his dog!	Katja: Oh poor thing.. Riitta: Relaxed life.. Katja: really.. Charme: poor babies, yep yep Katja: that would be a nice congregation in the one-room flat.. Riitta: sure! Charme: :-D Katja: quite patient couple. they have managed so long. Charme: well yes.
Context-based	sami4321: just heard that marko anttila is playing in Jokerit next season julli: jokerit should be in the finale Sampsis: did you know that anttila thing Julli? sami4321: nicknames are still changing :(julli: no but it sounds fine	Vapaaehtoischattaaja: who is salovaara? Ville: or what was that guy from Turku? Ree: is that pertti or his brother – his brother is also a radio journalist	Katja: the most important thing is self-confidence Charme: and you cannot take that back leadership just like that. It´s easier to be a stranger and show right away that you

	<p>Sampsis: is that anttila a good player? -- Santtuk: is it sure? -- santtuk: marko has told his neighbour that Helsinki is the address. There has been a dodge with joker stickers in their yard couple of times..</p>		<p>are in a higher position Katja: Yes. But how can you keep your own attitude right? Katja: I would also need some attitude training ;)</p>
Logistical	<p>Jutila: you need to change your nickname all the time Jutila: are you y Jullikka? Y: just joonas Y: The screen is freezing pretty bad Jutila: picture is freezing every 20 seconds. Jutila: freezing.. Jutila: is it sampsis? pepi2: we ´ll have nice three hours ahead of us y: i ´m here, but my nickname did something weird jutila: boooooooooooooooooooo</p>	<p>Ree: voice is breaking.. Ville: voice is breaking, irritating...</p>	<p>Riitta:Obs, someone is now talking finnish in space sounds.. -- can someone do something about it.. Charme: have to turn the volume down</p>
Non-Sequitur	<p>eehoo: sampsis, is Hanne watching the game?</p>	<p>Ree: raptori! Ree: who was listening as a kid /teenager?</p>	<p>Katja; Sari – wouldn´t that be suitable to your home?</p>
Phatic	<p>Sampsis: booze for levonen Sampsis:_ OOOUCCHH! Sampsis: MIIKKKA MÄNNIKKÖ Sampsis: YYYYYYYYYYYYYYYY!!!!!!!!!!!! Sampsis: that was goood</p>	<p>Anna: cha-lalala-lal--- la-ala -- Ree: hilfe, is this starting again? Anna: nooooo! Anna: !!! Ree: nightmare!! Anna: no raptori, noooo</p>	<p>Riitta::D Charme: and now some electronics.. Charme::D Charme: that woman will cry soon Charme: oh!</p>

1. Table: Typology of chat conversation during group online video viewing sessions.

Reading the chat conversation made it clear that different genres and different social relationships affect on peoples´ communication. Videos provided people naturally topics of discussion but also worked as a rich communication context or even a space where people can get together and talk about their common interest.

4.4 Experiences of Social Viewing

One of the study aims was to build a service that creates a co-viewing experience, feeling of watching the program alongside a group of friends. So far many online video sites are still to be watched alone and the services do not support synchronous (or near-synchronous like text chat) social conversation.

Test users were asked if chatting was creating this feeling of togetherness and co-viewing – like they were sitting next to each other on the couch.

- In this case real living-room seemed to be superior to a virtual one, because eight out of 14 users disagreed the statement.

Although chat was considered relatively easy way to communicate, it disturbed watching so much that virtual viewing situation wasn't comparable to authentic one. Software should not draw viewers' attention too much from the video screen.

"Nothing beats physical presence." man, 37 yrs.

"Well, it's hard to say... There was so much technical mess and we discussed about technical problems so much and tried to get the application work. So you can't really compare it to watching the game in a pub with your friends..." man, 29 yrs.

In some other social television studies audio chat has created this feeling of common couch more easily (e.g. Geerts 2006, Tullio et al. 2008, Schatz et al 2008). There is necessarily no significant difference between audio chat and face to face conditions. According to Baillie, social television users usually rank face to face situation highest, audio chat second and typing graphic symbols lowest. Audio chat is able to compete face to face viewing because people viewing television together actually watch each other only one to five times per minute – visual gestures do not have as large an impact on communication quality as it is often thought (Baillie et al. 2007). Some test users supposed that audio chat with a small headset could have improved the feeling of co-viewing also in this study.

In the test we did not succeed to create the emotional sphere of sociability so well, but technical problems may have affected this to some degree. Technical difficulties naturally affected users' motivation and opinions.

4.5 Suitable Genres for Sharing

In former social television studies researchers have established that e.g. sports events, animation, reality television, action adventure and documentaries are well suited to share and thus suitable for social viewing. Certain qualities in these programs encourage sociability more than others. Often these programs provide plenty of pauses and thus natural opportunities for conversation. (Baillie et al. 2007; Oehlberg et al. 2006) Type of content may have significant influence on communication. According to Schatz et al. also news and lifestyle programs may

encourage communication activity. In their mobile social television study users did not find user-generated content suitable for social viewing, but researchers noticed that people might be interested in viewing personal, self-authored content together instead of YouTube videos created by strangers. (Schatz et al. 2008)

We chose three different genres for the field test and people were asked if text chat suited well to the program type they were watching. Sports seemed to be the most popular genre for social viewing – although one should not generalize the results too much because of the small sample.

1. Despite the technical difficulties, six out of seven hockey enthusiasts agreed that chat suits well to viewing sports.
2. Two out of three Dog Whisperer viewers thought that chatting about Cesar Milan video was fun.
3. One "Maria!" show viewer thought chatting is fun when watching a talk show, two didn't. The person who liked chat did not find the show interesting.
"It's nice to chat about lousy programs." woman 30 yrs.

Interviews made it clear that people liked to chat, not necessarily about their favorite programs, but to videos that are considered "silly enough", like reality shows, sports, Independence Day Party etc. Test users said that some programs, like European Song Contest, need to be shared – otherwise they are not watched at all. These programs very often contain pauses and they are not followed very intensively. Test users also articulated that watching together somehow entitles viewing of "bad" programs, like naive Spanish soap operas, telenovelas. Clearly viewing together creates a new, more interesting layer to videos. This came out also in expectation interviews before the field test. Same kind of result arises in other studies: people have said that poor quality programs are often a good way to foster social interaction. People like to talk about poor casting, acting or effects and when there is no relevant dialogue in the show, they feel free to comment as much as they like. (cf. Oehlberg et al. 2006)

"Chatting works well with monotonic content, like sports, especially cross country skiing or athletics." man, 29 yrs.

"I could use this when watching reality shows or user generated videos. I would not chat when watching my favorite drama series or news." woman, 27 yrs.

In the expectation interviews some interviewees hoped for chat opportunity also to documentaries, talk shows, magazine programs and even news and someone also mentioned those genres in the field test. Social viewing of these programs, which are actually designed to give people important information and social currency, could encourage more serious conversation and thus strengthen civil society and even civic action.

However, test users also brought out that perhaps social viewing of good quality programs could be too demanding – it calls for deliberate attitude. Writing

comments about serious content easily exposes the commenter - his/ her general education and knowledge, discretion and values and the threshold to write at least with your own name will get higher. It seems that there are a growing number of web users who uninhibitedly unveil themselves and their private things in the internet, but also a growing number of those, like some of our interviewees, who quite carefully think about their web image and what they tell about themselves in public. These people criticized current media environment for alluring web users to express their emotions and thoughts spontaneously without thinking the possible effects of publicity.

"Well, a good drama you want to watch alone. The threshold would be higher to comment Ajankohtainen Kakkonen (a magazine program). Especially if you are writing with your own name, as you do in Facebook." woman, 29 yrs.

4.6 Small and Private Web TV Communities

Internet communities are often open spaces focused on expanding ones network of friends. People use traditional chat rooms for social contacts and networking, guidance or information needs and for personal fulfillment. Former social television studies consider that virtual communities base upon the viewers' interest in a TV program. They get together in order to find like-minded people, receive credible suggestions, reach some new information, e.g. details of a TV stars and also express themselves in public. Although there are open and anonymous social viewing platforms of online videos, in some studies web television communities are also considered rather small and closed, only for people you already know. (Kay & Johnsson 2004, Mantzari et al. 2008)

People in expectation interviews very strongly agreed with the idea of private communities and field test participants also preferred the idea of private social viewing channels. In the interviews they stated that anonymous internet chats and discussion forums are very often hostile and full of harassment. Some studies have confirmed the experience of our interviewees. For example Lange (2007 & 2008) has found out in her ethnographic study of YouTube that YouTube discussions and comments are often hostile and hurtful. She even calls some YouTube users as "haters" because they tend to leave mean-spirited comments to others which are often full of racism, sexism etc.

So it seems that chatting to videos may differ from traditional chat rooms and there is a demand for vehicles that allow people also to create private micro communities. Online videos are often a personal experience: they can be shared because of the self-expression and talking about them can also be unfolding.

"Channels should be private, because there is so much (hostility in internet) ... and you have to read comments of total jerks. I would not comment any television program in public." woman, 23 yrs.

"I don't want to be involved in the discussion which will never get you anywhere. Where people only fight and try to attack each others' weak points. It is a constructive problem of those (internet discussions)." man, 37 yrs.

People of this user study saw social viewing first and foremost as an activity which takes place among friends more than an opportunity to share viewing experience with like-minded strangers:

- 12 out of 14 users preferred private channels where people are invited and they know the person behind the nickname.
- Four out of 14 users were ready to chat also in public channels.

Those who were willing to chat in public channels did not mind arguing with other viewers. On the contrary, some of them were somehow thrilled with the idea. However, in public channels all users wanted to chat anonymously. In this study participants only used text chat, but Weisz and Kiesler (2008) have pointed out that people do not usually like to use audio chat with strangers. If the channel is public, text chat would be a preferred alternative. Obviously communicating with audio chat to a large number of people at once would be hard.

"The risk of misunderstandings in public channel is too big." woman, 23 yrs.

"It depends. I could chat in public but there should be also a private alternative." man, 17 yrs.

"Public channels would be gross, but fun..." man, 28 yrs.

In the field test ice hockey viewers were all chatting in one public channel. Two groups of friends did not all know each other, but it did not seem to bother them so much. It might be that the results related to privacy issues might have been slightly different, if the test users were all for example passionate fans, who are interested in getting new and valuable peer information from other fans and insiders.

One challenge of social viewing among friends is obviously time scheduling. Every day life can make joint viewing difficult. Many test users said that finding suitable time to sit down together to watch videos may be a difficult task:

- 9 out of 14 said that they would not have time for social viewing unless they organized the session in advance.

In the field test people were inviting each other to watch videos by email, but they said that in real life email would not reach them as well as for example Facebook. Facebook integration would also solve some of the user awareness and privacy issues: users would be aware of when their friends are present and ready for shared viewing because Facebook shows that with a green little symbol. And they would not share the videos with total strangers but with their own network.

Facebook integration was an option also in this user study, but was not implemented due to technical problems and because the pilot site was not public. Test users estimated that recommendations and invitations of their Facebook friends would greatly affect their video choices. It's very easy to click a link you see in your friends' Facebook profile. However, you don't necessarily stay and watch the video for a long time.

4.7 A value added feature?

One of the study aims was to examine if social viewing really adding some value to web broadcasts and online videos. People in expectation interviews liked the basic idea of social viewing and so did the field test participants, at least to some degree.

- However, only seven out of 14 test users said that they would actually use this kind of application in real life.
- None of the test users would have been ready to pay something for chat feature.

Some said that they don't need this kind of service because they do not watch (web) television so much and the others supposed that they simply would not have time. Many users preferred to share video links and write comments afterwards, not real-time. Those who estimated that they would chat said that social viewing would be fun especially when watching sports. Sport enthusiasts were more eager to use this kind of service in their every day life than others, although there were plenty of technical problems during that live stream event in the field test.

The other suitable occasion for social viewing might be when travelling or living abroad. People in expectation interviews hoped that viewing foreign online television channels and social viewing sites would be easier. They also thought that domestic online channels should be visible when travelling abroad. That would enable friends living far apart get together and even organize some social viewing events.

Although not all test users were interested in using the application, analyzing the research material shows that chatting clearly creates a higher level of engagement to videos:

- Four test users estimated that chat could make them watch more web broadcasts and online videos.
- Seven of them said that chat discussion may create such an interesting new layer to the video that they may watch it a little bit longer, even a video they do not actually like so much.
- Ten out of 14 users agreed with the general statement that chat was adding some value to the video they were viewing in the field test.

*"In this case chatting with my friends was more fun than watching the video..."
woman 30 yrs.*

5 Conclusion

In this user study we investigated the user expectations and reactions to the social viewing of online videos and live stream programs. It seems that at least in theory people liked the idea of social viewing and found the concept interesting. They pointed out that viewing television / video is basically social activity no matter what the device is. However, not all of them are eager to use this kind of social viewing application in their everyday life. There were technical difficulties during the field test and it is hard to say how much this affected people's opinions.

Some genres are better suited to share than others. In former social television studies e.g. sports, animation and reality television are often described to support communication and sociability. They provide plenty of pauses, poor dialogue and thus natural opportunities for conversation.

In this user study we tested three different program types and sport viewers liked the idea of social viewing most. It seems that people want to discuss about programs that are not necessarily their favorite shows but videos which are considered "silly enough". Test users pointed out that chatting to serious content (e.g. news or documentaries) could be interesting but challenging at the same time: good quality programs expose the commenter, his general education and knowledge and people do not necessarily want to tell so much about themselves in public, at least if they chat with strangers, distant friends or work colleagues.

Text chat is one possible communication channel for social viewing. In this study users found text chat relatively easy way to communicate, but it disturbed their viewing experience to some degree. Some of them supposed that audio/ voice chat could have been better alternative. Listening to other viewers rather than reading and typing could increase the feeling of co-viewing and authenticity. Now the test users did not really reach the feeling of togetherness and virtual living room could not compete with the real one.

One of the study aims was to examine if social viewing is adding value to online videos and web television. It became clear that at least it has a strong potential to do so. Despite all the technical difficulties during the field test, most test users thought that chat was adding some value to the video they were watching in the test. Social viewing service can support small communities, and watching videos together creates a higher level of engagement to them - seven test users estimated that chat alternative actually can make them watch videos a little bit longer. Service integration to other social media network sites like Facebook is important, because people very often want to share content easily with those they already know rather than seek new contacts. Some former social television studies consider that virtual communities are based on viewers' interest in a certain program. This test showed that it is more complicated than that. People may get together because of the program but they may stay together because of other viewers.

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