

Lessons From Facebook Applied to Social Television

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ABSTRACT

Facebook offers many features which translate well to a socially-mediated TV experience which is similarly intermittent. This paper briefly discusses two of these features: automated social stories and viral interactions among friends.

1. INTRODUCTION

Facebook is a social networking website which facilitates a multitude of online interactions with friends. More than simply a central place to share content and conversation, Facebook aggregates and displays a chronological list of the actions each friend initiates on Facebook. Thus, a user can log on to the website and see what his or her friends have been doing since the last login date. This allows for continued, asynchronous interactions with friends, suitable for a TV experience which is similarly intermittent.

2. PASSIVE MICRO-BLOGGING

Twitter mainstreamed the concept of micro-blogging, through which you can communicate to your friends what you are doing, what you are thinking, how you are feeling. But just like full blogging, the user has to actually compose and send the "tweet."

Facebook implemented a similar concept of status updates, but also introduced an aggregated News Feed which displays your friends' status updates, as well as information about all the actions your friends have taken, without any additional effort on their part. As you interact with your friends and their content, Facebook automatically generates social stories which appear in the news feeds for each connected friend. In this way, Facebook does some of the micro-blogging for its users.

When TVs are interconnected via an online social community, this sort of automation is vital to creating usable interactions within a user experience which would otherwise require typing via an onscreen keyboard. Some sort of text entry method is always necessary, but strategies to reduce such a dependency are equally necessary.

3. FACEBOOK FAN PAGES

One of the most viral features of Facebook is Fan Pages. One logs on to Facebook and sees in their news feed, "So and so became a fan of such and such." Following this announcement is the simple call to action, "Become a Fan". It is clean and simple, and also an easy way to communicate one's interests to all connected friends.

Confession of a fan boy

One day during the Olympics, I logged on to Facebook and saw in my news feed, "[A Friend's Name] became a fan of Michael Phelps." I immediately clicked the link and became a fan as well. Was it a sense of patriotism, a love of sport, true fanaticism, or a desire to belong? Very likely it was a combination of all of these, plus even a few more influences. As a Facebook user, I love the combination of the News Feed and Fan Pages for the following reasons:

1. I find out who shares my interests
2. I get exposed to new things
3. I am reminded of old things (which I'd forgotten about)
4. I allow my friends a reciprocal experience.

If this concept was brought to the TV, there could be a home screen with a news feed. (Figure 1) This feed would display a recent listing of what your friends have been watching and recording, which actors they have become fans of, various shout-outs and status messages, and descriptions of other activities initiated within the interactive television experience.

News Feed

- Steve is watching ABC News
- John recorded Lost on ABC
- Peter is rolling his eyes at Mary
- Peter recorded Sunday Night Football on NBC
- Mary says "I love Bruno!"
- Mary became a fan of Bruno Tonioli
- Mary scheduled a series recording of Dancing with the Stars
- Mary watched Dancing with the Stars on ABC

Figure 1. Example News Feed

The news feed would function as a navigable smart list such that you could select one of the items and begin to browse contextually relevant content, whether it be actor information, program details, or a friend's profile.

If you selected "Mary became a fan of Bruno Tonioli", the first action on the next screen would read "Become a fan". There would be other ways to interact with the actor, but of particular interest here is that it be simple and convenient to act upon the information from your news feed, similar to Facebook.

A natural complement to this nonlinear interaction would be a set of "Top Ten" lists which are aggregated from your friends' profiles. For example:

- Top 10 Programs
- Top 10 Series
- Top 10 Actors
- Top 10 Channels

Just as the news feed displays automated social stories which describe your friends' specific interactions with TV content and individual interests, Top Ten lists would be a repository their sustained interests and provide a way to feel connected to your collective group of friends.