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Gartner Says Second-Screen Users Will Drive Social TV Activities

Most Social TV Experiences Are Delivered Through Companion Apps for Portable Devices, Rather Than TVs

STAMFORD, Conn., March 20, 2013 — Second-screen devices combined with customised content, interactive apps and loyalty programmes will fuel the behaviour of social TV consumers over the next 24 months, according to Gartner, Inc.

Social TV describes consumer engagement, communication and interaction while watching television. Gartner said social TV activities can enhance the value of the TV experience for consumers and offer opportunities to add new users, drive engagement and open up new advertising opportunities through existing social networks.

"Second-screen devices such as tablets, smartphones and ultrabooks are likely to be the principal force behind social TV experiences as companion apps are increasingly written for that experience," said Michael Gartenberg, research director at Gartner. "A combination of content integration, social interaction and loyalty programmes are the key activities that will make up the social TV experience."

Long-term efforts to connect traditional TV broadcasts to the Internet have largely been limited to either content companion websites or connected devices such as TVs and set-top boxes (STBs) and that none of these approaches has led to the creation of a true social TV experience for consumers. However, three parts of this experience are now in the process of being combined into a holistic social TV experience delivered primarily through companion devices:

1. The use of social networks such as Facebook and Twitter to allow users to create and check status updates as they engage in real-time conversations related to TV programming
2. Apps that deliver bonus programming, tighter community engagement and larger social interaction through second-screen devices
3. Incentive programs that allow for more direct engagement with content to generate loyalty through rewards, check-ins and other gamification methods

These efforts have begun to bear fruit in terms of consumer adoption. Rather than delivering traditional Internet services such as web browsing or social media sites to a connected TV, there has been a shift to companion screens, such as media tablets, that show the benefits of the connected experience and the new activities that are now possible. Most social TV experiences are solely delivered through companion apps for portable devices rather than the TV or STB.

The growth of smartphones, media tablets and ultrabooks and their fast consumer adoption, combined with the rise and ubiquity of consumer social networks, has led to the first integration of consumer social actions to the TV experience and is now transforming expanded activities that can be leveraged by hardware vendors, content providers and advertisers to capture consumer attention.

"TV and video content providers such as cable companies have a great opportunity to target heavy users with social TV in order to reduce potential churn," said Mr Gartenberg. "The time to take advantage of this opportunity is right now as social TV services have not yet been dominated by a single solution and the market is far from saturated."

Some services have begun to embrace the social connection and are driving interaction between TV viewers, while others are using social TV to create loyalty programs that reward viewers for both watching and engaging with content. The net result of these activities will help turn users away from time-shifted catch-up TV experiences, and the commercial-skipping activity associated with them, and back toward live broadcasts. Loyalty programmes that add value for consumers will, in particular, help drive engagement with TV content.

The use of companion apps for social TV experience, combined with hardware additions for command and control, will present another incremental use for second-screen devices as well as creating additional perceived value as people spend more time using them. Gartner expects to see device vendors working with social TV apps to not only deliver content and services but also command and control functions for other hardware devices such as TVs, games consoles and audio systems.

Although social TV will be driven by second-screen devices, the television is expected to remain the primary device for sharing video content in the home. Connected TVs will give access to a much wider range of content via the Internet, offering the possibility of worldwide video sharing, which will also extend the social TV experience beyond local friends and into a truly global arena. In this case it will be the addition of a second screen that will drive the social experience.

"Watching TV was historically a social activity, either as a shared viewing experience or as the topic of post-viewing discussion and analysis," said Mr Gartenberg. "The power of extending shared TV viewing, commenting and critiquing, combined with new ways of offering recommendations to friends, have already proved successful in existing social networks. Embracing and extending these activities to second-screen social TV experiences will drive stronger consumer loyalty, extend the value of brands and content properties and accelerate the curve of both content success and failure in terms of consumer adoption."

More detailed analysis is available in the report "Market Trends: Second Screen Users Will Drive Social TV Activities." The report is available on Gartner's web site at <http://www.gartner.com/resId=2357015>.

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