

#Social TV: How We Watch TV Now  
**Sample Syllabus**

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### **Course Description**

We no longer simply watch television. Equipped with a multitude of devices, platforms, and choices, we stream, we binge, and we password share. The proliferation of social media and ‘second screen’ apps means that while we watch, we also tweet, hashtag, share, meme, and connect with fellow viewers all around the world. While these practices are not in themselves brand new, the convergence of television, the Internet, and social media has significantly reshaped what it means to be a viewer, as well as altered the television industry’s modes of production, distribution, and marketing. This course investigates what is known as ‘Social TV’ with both the everyday viewer experience and significant industry consequences in mind. Through a combination of academic analysis, discourse in the popular and trade presses, and hands-on experiences, we will trace the relationship between television and its viewers, and the ongoing linkages between television and new media.

### **Objectives**

Together, we will survey many of the key theoretical components of Social TV (flow, liveness, convergence culture, spreadability) and its significant practices (connected viewing, live-tweeting, viral content) to uncover the myriad of answers to the following questions: How do the multitude of screens alter our interactions with television and/or other viewers? What cultural productions result from the connectedness of contemporary viewers? In what ways have—or have not—been normalized over the last decade? How have networks, studios, and talent responded to the increasingly diverse and public activities of today’s viewers?

To unearth potential answers to these questions, students will complete an array of assignments, including hands-on participatory engagement with Social TV devices and apps, screenings, brief reflection papers, oral presentations, group projects, and a final critical research project. Through this course, students will:

- Develop a thorough understanding of Social TV devices, applications, and practices.
- Learn the fundamental structure of the television industry and how new media technology impacts the key players within the industry and consumers alike.
- Think critically about their personal media consumption habits that seem banal or common.

### **Readings**

To get a full range of the Social TV landscape, we will read a mix of scholarly perspectives and analysis from popular news sources. However, there are no books required for purchases for this course. All required readings and media materials are available on Canvas or on Media Reserves Desk located in the basement of the Herman B. Wells Library. I also encourage you to regularly browse web sites like [News for TV Majors](#), [The A.V. Club](#), [Entertainment Weekly](#), and industry press like [The Hollywood Reporter](#), [Lost Remote](#), [Verge](#), and [Variety](#) to keep up on current topics of discussion. If you find interesting articles, don’t be shy—bring them up in class.

## Policies

**Attendance:** Student attendance at all classes is expected and attendance will be taken every day. Be here, and be on time. If you are regularly late to class, it will impact your participation grade and if needed, count as a full absence. You have three absences to do whatever you want with, but every day missed after three impacts your participation grade by 10 percent. If you need to miss class for excusable reasons (major illness, family commitment, interview, etc.), please know that you still need to provide proper documentation.

**Participation:** While I will occasionally lecture, this is largely a discussion-based course powered by you and your engagement with the material. The majority of our discussions will stem from the major concepts in your readings and assignments. Therefore, it is essential that you not only do the reading, but also come to class ready to share your ideas and questions about it. Participation will be important to you because it is 10 percent of your final grade, but know that I want this course to be as interactive as it is informative.

Also know that we will be discussing a variety of topics, some of them with political underpinnings. Productive engagement with a diverse range of ideas requires respect for and maturity directed towards the ideas of the assigned authors as well as one's classmates. We will not discriminate against or criticize members of the class based on gender, ethnic origin, sexual orientation, disability, or any other such factor. I expect professional and intelligent discourse from you all.

**Work Load:** We'll to cover quite a bit of material over the next 16 weeks. The reading will be occasionally challenging and sometimes long, and you'll have to do some outside research here and there. Please reserve a few hours outside of class meetings each week to prepare.

**Late Work:** Class assignments will be considered late if you fail to turn them in before class time on the assigned due date. Late work will only be accepted up to **48 hours** after the original due date and will be docked **10 percent per day late**.

**Technology:** I allow you to use your devices for classroom purposes. If your technology use becomes disruptive, or if I can tell that you're *not* using it for class purposes, I will needle you about it once, and then simply start deducting participation points. Be respectful.

**Special Needs:** If you have any special needs that may affect your work in this course, please let me know during the first week of the semester so we can work together to accommodate them. If you have a memo from Disability Services for Students, please also provide me a copy during the first week.

**Plagiarism:** Per the Indiana University Code of Student Rights, Responsibilities, and Conduct (2010), students "may be disciplined for several different kinds of academic misconduct. These include cheating, fabrication, plagiarism, interference, and violation of course rules. In particular the code states:

Plagiarism is defined as presenting someone else's work, including the work of other students, as one's own. Any ideas or materials taken from another source for either written or oral use must be fully acknowledged, unless the information is common knowledge. What is considered 'common knowledge' may differ from course to course.

- a. A student must not adopt or reproduce ideas, opinions, theories, formulas, graphics, or pictures of another person without acknowledgement.
- b. A student must give credit to the originality of others and acknowledge indebtedness whenever:

1. Directly quoting another person's actual words, whether oral or written;
2. Using another person's ideas, opinions, or theories;
3. Paraphrasing the words, ideas, opinions, or theories of others, whether oral or written;
4. Borrowing facts, statistics, or illustrative material; or
5. Offering materials assembled or collected by others in the form of projects or collections without acknowledgement." (Quoted from Code of Student Rights, Responsibilities, and Conduct, Part II, Student Responsibilities, Academic Misconduct)"

## **Assignments**

This course will ask you to complete a variety of assignments that will evaluate your comprehension of the material and your ability to apply the more theoretical concepts to contemporary issues and case studies. The assignments are designed to give you flexibility in how you approach the world of Social TV. Across the semester, you will produce brief reflection papers on various viewing experiences, deliver short oral presentations in front of your classmates, develop a Social TV experience of your own, and cultivate a critical research essay. The more detailed assignment breakdown is as follows:

**Participation (10%):** You are expected to be physically and mentally present in class on a regular basis. For the sessions to go smoothly, you should actively contribute to our discussions and bring all the necessary materials each and every day.

**Reading Responses (10%):** To make certain that everyone is keeping up with the reading, once a week students will post a very brief response (no more than two full paragraphs) on Canvas. Students can discuss portions of the reading they found interesting, troublesome, or confusing, relate it previous material, or connect it to a current event. You can post your response whichever day you'd like, but it must be live on Canvas before we cover it in class. These will be graded on a Check-Plus, Check, Check-Minus scale.

**Social Program Report (10%):** Mid-way through the semester, each student will investigate the 'social sphere' surrounding a current TV show of their choosing. You will examine the show's 'official' social media presence—include Twitter and Facebook accounts, the accounts of its stars, any recent popular hashtags, etc.—as well as some of the more 'unofficial' social discussion being had by viewers and fans online. You will deliver a brief (no more than seven minutes) in-class presentation, complete with visual examples, making note of the key differences between the official and unofficial social footprints.

**Social Production Activities (10%):** Twice during the semester, students will produce and distribute their own kind of social content—including memes, hashtags, mock 'in-character' social media accounts, or anything else you can imagine. These cultural products are not intended to be 'good' and therefore will not be graded on their artistic merits. Instead, these exercises are intended to function as creative examples of what contemporary viewers 'do' in between—or even during—episodes of their favorite programs.

**Viewing Experience Reflection Papers (Three @ 5% each = 15%):** A few times during the semester, we will, as a class, participate in Social TV screening experiences. For example, we

will watch programs together, free of devices, and then together, with devices everywhere. In another instance, we will all watch the same few episodes of a show, but in different ways—some one episode per day, others binge-watching all at once. To supplement these screening activities, you will craft brief 2-3 page personal reflections that highlight your thoughts on the experience, how it mirrors or conflicts with previous class discussions on these practices. These reflections are intended to help you crystallize some the ways in which devices and platforms are embedded into our everyday screening habits.

**Social Program Pitch (20%):** Near the end of the semester, you will work in groups to demonstrate what you have learned about Social TV and its influence on the TV industry. In groups of three or four, students will develop their own idea for a new theoretical television series, its intended audience, network/digital platform, and social media campaign. The project will include a 3-4 page paper displaying the key characteristics of the series and its social campaign, as well as informed justification for why the students have chosen this particular path for their new show. Each group will then complete a 10-minute ‘pitch’ of their idea in class to a panel of ‘executives’ (including me and a few guests). All groups will be graded individually, but the group with the most successful pitch, as determined by the panel, will receive a small number of extra credit points.

**Final Research Paper (25%):** The course’s final project will ask you to critically investigate a significant topic related to Social TV in the form of a 5-6 page analytical paper. The key objective for you with this project is to make clear, considered argument that is supported by outside research (of both academic and popular press writings on the topic). Your topic could be a current controversy regarding a Social TV practice, an issue related to a particular show’s social media footprint, problematic consequences of the Social TV experience, or an industry trend responding to Social TV.

Students are free to pick their own topics, but you will be asked to submit a proposal approximately mid-way through the semester so both I and your peers can work with you to craft the best possible project. A second round of peer review on papers-in-progress will occur near the end of the semester as well. The ultimate goal of this assignment is for you to apply the theoretical concepts we’ve learned in class to an additional contemporary Social TV case study.

## **Course Calendar & Readings**

Note #1: Barring a few exceptions, hyperlinked readings are popular press perspectives on the week's topics. They are all linked on Canvas, but clicking here will take you directly to them. Non-hyperlinked readings are longer, more scholarly perspectives and PDF versions can be found on Canvas as well.

Note #2: Assignment due dates are found at the end of their given week, prefaced by "A".

## **UNIT 1: SOCIAL TV FOUNDATIONS**

### *Week 1: Introduction to Social TV*

We will begin by introducing the course and its aims, explore some of the key pieces of technology at the center of the Social TV revolution, and broadly consider what the experience of watching television is like in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Key questions:

- What do we mean by 'Social'? By 'Television'?
- Who are the significant stakeholders playing a role in the phenomenon of Social TV?
- What are some of the historical descendants of Social TV?
- How does Social TV reshape the experience of being a television viewer?

#### READING:

- Hugh McIntyre, "[The MTV Video Music Awards Go for the Second Screen Experience,](#)" *Forbes*, August 21, 2014
- Alex Williams, "[For Millennials, The End of the TV Viewing Party,](#)" *New York Times*, November 7, 2014.
- Adam Flomenbaum, "[Nielsen Study: Strong Correlation Between Twitter TV Activity and General Audience Engagement,](#)" *Lost Remote*, March 9, 2015.

### *Week 2: Viewers, Fans, and the Industry*

Before diving into a more specific investigation of Social TV practices, we'll journey back a few decades to the 1980s to consider the initial rise of fan and audience studies. This week will consider the relationship between the viewer and television as a technology, and between viewers and television as an industry. Key questions:

- How did scholars and the industry generally view audiences and fans before the 1980s?
- What are the distinctions between audience consumption and production?

#### READING:

- John Fiske, "The Cultural Economy of Fandom," in *The Adoring Audience: Fan Culture and Popular Media*, 1992, 30-49.
- Henry Jenkins, "'Get a Life': Fans, Poachers, Nomads," in *Textual Poachers*, 1992, 9-32.

### *Week 3: Convergence Culture*

Our second foundational week brings us into the 21<sup>st</sup> century with an exploration of recent technological innovations and the multitude of ways they have reshaped consumer agency and industry practices. Key questions:

- What is ‘Convergence Culture’ and who participates within this culture?
- How has the Internet and new media technologies altered the relationship between viewers and the industry?
- What are the stakes in a world where viewers are visibly active producers of content?

READING:

- Henry Jenkins, “Introduction: ‘Worship at the Altar of Convergence’,” in *Convergence Culture: When New and Old Media Collide*, 2008, 1-19.
- Jason Mittell, [“Wikis and Participatory Fandom,”](#) *Just TV*, September 18, 2010.
- Neil Brady, [“Television Remains Resilient as Convergence of Content Continues,”](#) *The Guardian*, April 16, 2014.
- Sharon Marie Ross, [“Television’s Invitation to Participate,”](#) *Spreadable Media*, 2013.

**A: Viewing Experience Paper #1 Due**

*Week 4: The State of the Industry*

In our final foundational week, we will sketch out the current state of the television industry—the major players, the concentration of media ownership, and the embrace of various technological innovations. Key questions:

- What are the differences between broadcast, basic, and pay cable? How does media consolidation magnify or diminish those differences?
- Who are the emerging players on the Internet and why are they challenging the longstanding business practices of ‘traditional’ TV?
- What are the key methods of production, distribution, and audience measurement?

READING:

- Amanda Lotz, “Understanding Television at the Beginning of the Post-Network Era,” in *The Television Will be Revolutionized*, 2014, 21-40.
- Lotz, “Television Outside the Box: The Technological Revolution of Television,” in *The Television Will be Revolutionized*, 2014, 53-75.

**UNIT 2: SOCIAL TV PRACTICES**

*Week 5: Streaming, Bingeing, and Shifting*

We begin our investigation of contemporary viewing practices with a look at the variety of ways in which we access and consume television. This week considers the rise of streaming video, the decline of ‘live’ viewing, the practice of binge watching, and more. Key questions:

- What are the differences between time-shifting and place-shifting?
- Why are ‘liveness’ and flow important to the television industry?
- How do the experiences of streaming TV on your laptop and watching ‘live’ on a TV differ?
- Is streaming television still ‘TV’ at all?

READING:

- Raymond Williams, "Programming: Distribution and Flow," in *Television: Technology and Cultural Form*, 1974, 79-88.
- Elizabeth Evans, "Downloading Television: Agency, Immediacy, and the Transmedia Audience," in *Transmedia Television*, 2011, 161-171.
- Nolan Feeney, "[When, Exactly, Does Watching a Lot of Netflix Become a 'Binge'?](#)" *The Atlantic*, February 18, 2014.
- Amanda Lotz, "[Bingeing Isn't Quite the Word](#)," *Antenna*, October 29, 2014.
- Poncie Rutsch, "[Does Binge-Watching Make Us Depressed? Good Question](#)," *NPR*, February 4, 2015.

**A: Viewing Experience Paper #2 Due**

*Week 6: Connected and/or Multi-tasking Viewing*

This week concentrates on the *other things* we do while we watch TV—the other devices we fiddle with, the social networks we casually check, and the other viewers whom with which we engage. Key questions:

- How does connected viewing impact our attentiveness to television and traditional notions of flow?
- What devices are most commonly part of the connected viewing experience?
- What type of viewers and viewership does connected viewing privilege?

READING:

- Ethan Tussey, "Connected Viewing on the Second Screen: The Limitations of the Living Room," in *Connected Viewing: Selling, Streaming, & Sharing in the Digital Age*, 2013, 202-216
- Chuck Tryon and Max Dawson, "Streaming U: College Students and Connected Viewing," in *Connected Viewing*, 2013, 217-234.
- Aaron Smith, "[The Rise of the 'Connected Viewer'](#)," *Pew Research Center*, July 17, 2012.

*Week 7: Twitter, Live-Tweeting, and Hashtags*

We dedicate an entire week to the social platform most commonly associated with Social TV, Twitter. This exploration goes much deeper than 140 characters, and considers the array of viewer activities and practices that occur on Twitter before, during, and after their favorite shows. Key questions:

- How does live-tweeting reconstitute our prior conceptualizations of liveness and/or participation?
- How do the 140 characters shape the manner in which viewers offer their running commentary on TV?
- Why is Twitter so successful in producing the collective 'digital watercooler'?

READING:

- Chuck Tryon, "The Twitter Effect: Social Media and Digital Delivery," in *On-Demand Culture: Digital Delivery and the Future of Movies*, 2013, 117-135.
- Claire Peracchio, "[Why Facebook and Twitter Are Fighting Over Your Television](#)," *The Atlantic*, October 7, 2013.

- Laura Stampler, [“How to Get Away With Hashtags: When Viewers and Networks Collide on Twitter,”](#) *Time*, October 2, 2014.
- Zainab Akande, [“How \*Scandal\* and \*Hannibal\* Are Winning The Social Media Game,”](#) *IndieWire*, October 23, 2014.

### **A: Viewing Experience Paper #3 Due**

### **A: Social Program Reports Begin in Class**

#### *Week 8: Memes, Vine, & Viral Content*

This week turns to more visibly ‘productive’ viewer practices. We address the production of memes, GIFs, and Vines associated with TV content and contemplate on the phenomenon of virality/spreadability. Key questions:

- Where do we play the production of memes, GIFs, etc. on the continuum of fan-made texts?
- How can we characterize the viewer-made content that ‘goes viral’ on the web?
- In what ways do these productions disrupt and/or supplement the traditional viewing experience?

#### READING:

- Henry Jenkins, Sam Ford, and Joshua Green, “Why Media Spreads,” in *Spreadable Media*, 2013, 1-34.
- Josh Kurp, [“10 Memes That Originated from TV Shows,”](#) *Uproxx*, May 9, 2012.
- Tad Friend, [“Hollywood and Vine,”](#) *The New Yorker*, December 15, 2014.
- Drew Magary, [“The Quest for Virality Is Making Everything Shitty,”](#) *Deadspin*, February 5, 2015.

### **A: Social Production #1 in Class**

### **A: Final Project Proposals Due**

#### *Week 9: Politics, Representation, & Controversy*

Though today’s viewers can instantly live-tweet jokes or share GIFs about their favorite shows, they can also come together on social media to comment on important—or controversial—events and issues happening in real time. This week investigates how social media and TV work in concert to catalyze more explicitly political discourse. Key questions:

- What role did social media and cable news coverage play in the public response to significant cultural events such as Ferguson?
- How does that response differ from more ‘typical’ Social TV that we’ve discussed?
- In what ways are politics and explicitly political events like elections and the State of the Union framed on social media?

#### READING:

- Robinson Meyer, [“A New Study Says Twitter Can Predict U.S. Elections,”](#) *The Atlantic*, August 13, 2013.



- Colleen Shalby and Hari Sreenivasan, [“How Twitter is Getting it Right in Ferguson,”](#) *PBS Newshour*, August 14, 2014. (AUDIO)
- Lorena O’Neil, [“Ferguson Prosecutor Blames Social Media and Twitter Strikes Back,”](#) *The Hollywood Reporter*, November 24, 2014.
- Eric Deggans, [“Four Lessons From The Media’s Conflicted Coverage of Race,”](#) *NPR*, December 6, 2014.
- Alex Altman, [“How Twitter Changed the State of the Union,”](#) *Time*, January 20, 2015.

### **UNIT 3: INDUSTRY PRACTICES**

#### *Week 10: Managing the Social*

The first week in our third unit highlights some of the central tactics deployed by forces within the television industry to ‘manage’ or ‘channel’ viewer activity. We will tackle how the industry blends programming with marketing content, rewards certain types of viewer behavior over others, and attempts to make social activity legible to advertisers and investors. Key questions:

- What are the most notable network-approved second screen apps, and why do we think so many of these potential platforms have failed to catch on with viewers?
- How does the industry attempt to channel viewer activity toward practices that explicitly benefit their corporate agendas?
- What role does branding play in the framing of industry-approved social content?

#### READING:

- Cory Barker, [“It’s Not TV, It’s Twitter: HBO’s Branding Practices and Tweeting Quality and Distinction,”](#) *The Projector: A Journal Film, Media, and Culture*, 2015.
- Trent Moore, [“Could Fringe Be the First TV Series Saved By a Twitter Hashtag?”](#) *Blastr*, February 23, 2012.
- Bryan Bishop, [“How a Second-Screen App Made \*The Walking Dead\* Come Alive,”](#) *The Verge*, February 13, 2014.
- Annie Lowery, [“Advertisers Seek a ‘Second Screen’ Connection With Viewers,”](#) *New York Times*, May 4, 2014.

### **A: Pitch Project Groups Finalized**

#### *Week 11: Channeling Productivity*

Picking up right where the previous left off, we will consider how the industry develops social and web content that plays directly into the interests of active (or even semi-active) viewers. This week returns to the production of audience- or fan-made texts, with an eye toward the ways in which the industry ‘approves’ those texts for marketing purposes. Key questions:

- What are transmedia storytelling and how does it supplement the Social TV experience?
- How would do we characterize the ‘gamification’ of Social TV?
- What are the consequences of the industry using audience-made texts for its own gain?

READING:

- Henry Jenkins, “Searching for the Origami Unicorn: *The Matrix* and Transmedia Storytelling,” in *Convergence Culture: Where Old Media and New Media Collide*, 2008, 93-122.
- Michael Lahey, “The Framing of Value: Television, User-Generated Content, and Interactive Involvement,” *Convergence: The International Journal of Research Into New Media Technologies*, 2015, 1-14.
- Myles McNutt, [“Production Mythology, Release Reality: Syfy’s Defiance,”](#) *Antenna*, January 21, 2013.
- Myles McNutt, [“One World, Two Ways In \(For Some\),”](#) *Antenna*, February 2013.

**A: Social Production #2 in Class**

*Week 12: Netflix, Amazon, & Web TV*

This week scans the increasingly important landscape of internet-based TV. We will investigate how major web platforms such as Netflix, Amazon, and Hulu are changing the way TV is produced and distributed, and take a look at some of the lesser-known platforms as well. Key questions:

- How do the original series from Netflix, Amazon, et al. differ from ‘traditional’ TV? How are they similar?
- What trends in original series production and digital distribution can we identify, and can we trace those back to contemporary viewer Social TV practices?
- What is ‘television’ in the world where original programming can be found everywhere from Yahoo to YouTube to Vimeo?

READING:

- Nancy Hass, [“And the Award for the Next HBO Goes To...,”](#) *GQ*, January 2013.
- Neil Irwin, [“Netflix vs. Amazon, and the New Economics of Television,”](#) *New York Times*, April 25, 2014.
- Jason Lynch, [“How Amazon Built a TV Studio That’s Finally Challenging Netflix,”](#) *Quartz*, August 12, 2014.
- Aymar Jean Christian, [“How High Maintenance Became the Future of Indie TV,”](#) *IndieWire*, November 18, 2014.

*Week 13: The Affective Economics of TV’s Social Revolution*

Our final week in Unit 3 surveys the multitude of ways in which viewers and the industry (oftentimes represented by actors, writers, producers, etc.) interact in Social TV spaces like Twitter, but also how the industry encourages direct viewer investment via donation platforms like Kickstarter and Indiegogo. We will consider the consequences of these interactions and how viewers are active participants in processes that ultimately benefit the industry above all else.

Key questions:

- What is affective economics and how is it deployed by the industry in Social TV space?
- How do Kickstarter campaigns and Amazon’s Pilot Season encourage viewer participation?
- What do viewers gain by direct engagement with the industry, and how can they use that engagement for their own personal goals?

READING:

- Matt Hills, “*Veronica Mars*, Fandom, and the ‘Affective Economics’ of Crowdfunding Poachers,” *New Media & Society*, 2015, 183-197.
- Cory Barker, “Great Shows, Thanks to You: Amazon Studios’ Pilot Season and Discourses of Participation,” 2015, 1-15. (Working Paper)
- Alan Sepinwall, “[Veronica Mars Creator Rob Thomas on The Wildly Successful Kickstarter Movie Campaign](#),” March 15, 2013.
- Kim Masters, “[Making TV the Amazon Studios Way](#),” *KCRW’s The Business*, April 21, 2014 (AUDIO).

**UNIT 4: THE FUTURE OF SOCIAL TV**

Week 14: *Pitch Projects*

READING: N/A

**A: Group Pitch Projects in Class**

*Week 15: Tracing Social TV’s Potential Future*

In our final week of class, we will take a look at a few potential futures for the Social TV phenomenon. Having examined a number of different platforms, practices, and issues, we will try to project where Social TV could go in the next few years, and how the viewer experience might evolve as well. Key questions:

- How have the key Social TV practices become embedded into the everyday experience of watching TV, and could any of those practices become dislodged from that experience?
- What Social TV practices matter the most in your personal everyday experiences?
- What elements of Social TV will survive into the next few years?

READING:

- Richard Kastelein, “[Reports of Social TV’s Death of Have Been Greatly Exaggerated](#),” *Wired*, May 2013.
- Janko Roettgers, “[Let’s Face It: Social TV is Dead](#),” *Gigaom*, January 29, 2014.
- Simon Dumenco, “[Social TV is Dead; Long Live Social TV](#),” *Ad Age*, May 12, 2014.
- Interview with Ted Sarandos, Chief Content Officer, Netflix, in *Distribution Revolution: Conversations about the Digital Future of Film and Television*, 2015, 132-145.

*Week 16: Final Projects Due*

READING: N/A

**Final Projects Due at DATE/TIME**