# Chapter 5

## Social TV Ratings

# Adding a New Dimension to Television Audience Measurement

Computer geek turned secret agent Chuck Bartowski made his character debut on September 24, 2007. NBC's one-hour action comedy *Chuck* quickly found itself an extremely loyal following.

In its series premiere, a sequence of events is set into motion when Chuck's former college roommate-turned-CIA agent Bryce sends him an encoded e-mail. After cracking the puzzle, Chuck suddenly finds himself with the US Government's top NSA and CIA intelligence downloaded to his brain. This set the stage for a television series plot that would give its audience an interesting combination of action, adventure, mystery, and comedy. *Chuck* premiered with over nine million viewers[1] watching—a number that represented the highest ratings the series has garnered to date.

Toward the end of *Chuck's* second season, NBC announced a radical strategic shift to its primetime programming format for the upcoming 2009 fall television season. Late night program host Jay Leno would be leaving *The Tonight Show* in favor of a one-hour primetime series simply called *The Jay Leno Show*.[2] In order to accommodate this change, NBC would be canceling five of its scripted series—and *Chuck* was, as the television industry says, "on the bubble."

*Chuck*'s audience size had steadily dropped by an estimated average of 1,200,000 viewers between the first and second season.[3] There were reports that NBC.com was referencing *Chuck*'s season two finale as a series finale.[4] *Chuck*'s feverishly passionate fans refused to merely sit idly by and wait for NBC's decision. Instead, they would end up proving themselves as a force to be reckoned with.

Viewers took to the Web and launched a full-fledged campaign in hopes of convincing NBC to renew *Chuck* for a third season. While there were many online petitions, discussion groups, forums, blog posts, and videos that made

their appeal, one site in particular helped to lead the charge. On April 6, 2009, GiveMeMyRemote.com released a post whose title gave a nod to the "Nerd Herd"—the name of Chuck's technical support team at fictitious electronics store "Buy More."[5]

"Be a Nerd . . . Join the Herd. Save CHUCK." The simple yet powerful mantra provided *Chuck* viewers with an arsenal of resources to help get new people to watch the show and increase its Nielsen ratings—the very measure that television networks use to determine a TV show's success. If fans could spread the word to tune in and "save Chuck" for the second season's remaining three episodes, perhaps that could help augment the show's viewership. Among the hundreds of comments left on the post was the following from "StephanieP," who wrote:

> *I cannot imagine what a world without Chuck would be like! It always helps me to get through Mondays. Using word of mouth IS an effective way to get people to watch Chuck. I started watching last year after a friend of mine told me about [it]. Then this season I got another friend interested. Now all three of us get together every week and watch.*

The "Save Chuck" campaign encouraged show fans to use their Facebook status updates to express their love for *Chuck* and to remind friends to tune in to the show at eight o'clock every Monday. Downloadable "Save Chuck" postcards, badges, and Twitter backgrounds were created, and fans encouraged one another to retweet any *Chuck*-related blog posts. A #SaveChuck hashtag was quickly adopted as a real-time conversation connector on Twitter, enabling anyone to easily follow along and participate on the popular microblogging platform.[6]

In addition to vying for NBC's attention, fans also gave their support to advertiser Subway (whose brand is frequently integrated into the show) by rallying the public to go to their nearest Subway, buy a footlong sub, and thank the company for supporting *Chuck*.[7] Helping the cause was *Chuck* star Zachary Levi who led a group of hundreds of convention-goers in the United Kingdom to their local Subway on April 26, 2009. "Inundate the Internet. Let it get all over the place. It seems pretty apropos to me to get a whole convention of nerds, like myself, to sell out a Subway," Zach said in front of the crowd.[8] Once there, Zack even got behind the popular submarine sandwich shop's counter himself to help manage the friendly mob.

The day of reckoning came on May 19, 2009 when NBC released a statement announcing that it had made the decision to renew *Chuck* for a third season. "Renewal Represents Triumph for Fans and TV Critics Who Waged Successful Online and Twitter 'Save Chuck' Campaign Supported by Subway" read the subheading on the NBC press release.[9] Not only did the network acknowledge the groundswell of fan support; it also managed to strike an upfront advertising deal with Subway to help finance *Chuck*'s third season.

# Nielsen Is the Currency by Which Advertisers and TV Networks Transact

> *The default mechanism is absolutely the Nielsen rating. We wake up to that report card every single morning and it is still a very useful tool.*
>
> *—Geri Wang, President of Sales and Marketing at ABC*

In 1950, Nielsen, the global information and measurement company, took the audience measurement methodologies that it had developed for radio and adapted them for the emerging and growing medium of television.[10] While many people today might think of Nielsen as a ratings company, it is, in effect, the arbiter of most of the advertising that goes through our video screens across platforms, and a significant provider of marketing and consumer information. As Nielsen's Senior Vice President of Media and Agency Insights Jon Gibs illustrated for us:

> *Our TV ratings are the industry standard for buying and selling television advertising; they essentially dictate how dollars and cents are traded within the TV industry. For much of Nielsen's history, the TV-side of the business was almost more of an auditing company whose job was to present numbers in-market that advertisers and TV networks could use to transact.*

As such, Nielsen has to undergo a rigorous auditing process and be held accountable to the numbers on which they report, since "billions upon billions" of dollars are at stake. Given that businesses rely on these figures as a means by which to make major media buys, the data behind them must be nothing short of absolutely dependable.

To get an idea of how the process works—a single Nielsen ratings point equates to 1 percent of all US households with television sets.[11] So, a rating of 6.0 for a given TV show means that an estimated 6 percent of all TV households tuned into that show. Nielsen recalculates this number—which is currently at 114,600,000[12]—each August to prepare for the new fall TV season.

While the source for Nielsen's television ratings system started out as self-reported data from handwritten diaries, the 1990s introduced "set meters" physically connected to television sets. They are now able to report minute-by-minute ratings based on viewers' channel surfing behaviors within the company's sample set for Nielsen's national markets.

Since then, Nielsen has also created its "C3 rating," representing the audience size for a given TV show's commercial time. This is defined by the average of all of the commercial minutes within a TV episode, plus three days of commercial viewing during time-shifted (DVR) playback. Any fast forwarding of commercials within the three-day window is excluded from the ratings calculation.

While Nielsen data is not perfect, changing the way in which the ratings system gets modeled and measured is a far more complicated endeavor than it appears on the surface. Though the Holy Grail data source is, of course, households' set-top boxes, this approach comes with numerous constraints. One in particular is outdated hardware and lack of connectivity, which prevents speedy progress down this path. Hundreds of siloed systems would need to be stitched together before this could even start to happen. In addition, set-top box data alone is not necessarily a complete answer. It currently cannot report on the demographics of who within the household is watching and whether or not the television set was actually turned on since today's cable boxes tend not to be powered off.

Given the importance and need for both consistency and reliability of Nielsen data, the company will always err on the side of extreme caution as it considers how the process of rating television is evolving. And while TV networks continue to value Nielsen as the de facto standard when measuring their programming's performance, the emergence of social media has given them another dimension to consider. We call this the "social rating."

# Social Media Creates a Feedback Loop for Television

*We as a network believe the value of our brand is beyond just the C3 rating. We are now able to assemble a presentation about a show, like Gossip Girl, and paint a much broader picture so that we're able to qualify, in some way, that the show is much bigger than just the Nielsen measurement.*

*— Alison Tarrant, EVP Integrated Sales and Marketing at The CW*

We discussed in the first chapter how the backchannel is bringing people back to watching television live again. Chapter 3 examined the TV check-in landscape and we demonstrated in the previous chapter how the second screen has become a companion to television. All of these social TV activities are taking place *while* people are watching television—and, in the process, are creating lots of raw data as viewers engage.

Tweets per second, volume of show mentions, number of check-ins, amount of posts, and conversation sentiment are just a few of the metrics that social media produces to which television networks have easy access. This, in turn, gives networks information in addition to (although not in *replacement* of) Nielsen ratings. Social media can help to add in color where Nielsen cannot in order to reveal nonapparent insights. This was the case for ABC's *Castle* as Rick Mandler, ABC's Vice President of Digital Media, explained to us:

*Though Castle was a success coming out of the gate, it was not a huge success—yet it was very strong online. That showed us that there was an audience for the show and that we needed to get behind it and be patient— and that proved to work out for the best.*

Since a growing amount of television networks are turning to social media for insights, we wondered whether or not this would begin to affect how the industry thinks about television ratings. However, Nielsen executive Jon Gibs was very clear about the fact that a TV rating is very distinct from a social rating—and that the two are unlikely to blend to become one:

*There's no specific reason to account for social media within TV ratings which are a specific thing: namely, the number of people who watch a program. Nowadays, there's a need in the market to understand the impact of social on driving the amount of people that watch TV, so that a TV broadcaster as a marketer can understand how to engage with social media in order to get more people to watch their program. But there's no real need to actually enhance a TV rating itself—specifically with social media data.*

While the Nielsen rating will not change to incorporate the notion of a social rating, there is no denying that insights from social media continue to grow in value as a source of information to both television networks and TV advertisers. The question that continues to be on everyone's minds, however, has to do with the relationship between the two.

# Does Social Media Engagement Correlate to Ratings?

Back in October of 2010, we did a small experiment to see if there was a relationship between the degree of backchannel conversation during new fall TV premieres versus their resulting Nielsen ratings and, hence, audience size.[13] Since over one-third of new television shows get canceled each year, we wondered if we could use this data to predict which ones may be at risk.

We looked at data from 19 different TV show premieres using popular social media monitoring tool Radian6 to extract backchannel tweets that took place during each of the respective shows' premiere episodes. Using easily accessible Twitter data made the most sense, given the fact that tweets are public and therefore provided us with a consistent and standardized backchannel source.

For each show premiere, we compared volume of Twitter mentions with the episode's number of Nielsen broadcast impressions. We also used Radian6 to sample positive sentiment before, during, and after each premiere, and tracked

any change in this using a line graph. While we recognize that autosentiment analysis is far from perfect, it gave us a directional baseline by which to compare across shows.

As we looked at the data, we noticed that CBS's *Hawaii Five-0* premiere was one that immediately stood out as having both the highest impressions as well as Twitter volume across our sample of shows. It also was one of the few new fall TV shows where positive sentiment continued to increase as the show progressed and thereafter.

On the other side of the spectrum fell NBC's *Outlaw*, which had both low broadcast impressions and low Twitter mentions. Its level of positive sentiment was relatively high before the show began, had an ever-so-slight increase at the episode start, and then dwindled down midway and beyond. It was not surprising to us when NBC announced *Outlaw*'s cancellation shortly thereafter.

While the extreme cases (in which the two data points together were either high or low) were fairly clear cut in determining whether or not the show would survive, most shows were not as black and white. NBC's *Undercovers* was the only show premiere in our sample where Twitter mentions visually outnumbered broadcast impressions on our chart (broadcast impressions were expressed in millions). The show's overall positive sentiment was moderately good as it settled back down to preshow levels after getting a notable bump during the broadcast. Despite the high volume of Twitter mentions with modest ratings, NBC announced *Undercovers*' cancellation after only seven episode airings.

*Law and Order LA*, on the other hand, was the exact mirror opposite. Its premiere episode garnered extremely high broadcast impressions with only a medium amount of Twitter mentions that produced decreasing positive sentiment as the show aired. Regardless, its minimal social media chatter simply did not matter, since *Law and Order* is what we like to call a "Nielsen ratings machine." It is also one that reiterates this book's consistent theme that scripted dramas tend to produce lower volume backchannels during show airings.

So in the end, the burning question on everyone's mind is: Does the social media conversation drive TV ratings? The answer is that there is no scientific proof that makes a direct and exact conclusion—*yet*.

# Television Networks Are Seeing a Relationship

*We're hearing more frequently that producers have changed the live television event layout to actually drive more tweeting early on to help compel the highest possible rating. You used to hold your biggest acts until later in the show. But instead, Lady Gaga opened the 2011 VMAs, whereas she would normally have done her act at the half way or the two thirds*

*mark in the past. Producers now want to get the Twitter ripple going early and then play it out.*

> *—Chloe Sladden, Director of Content and Programming at Twitter*

While science has yet to indisputably prove a direct correlation between the size of a TV series' backchannel and its resulting ratings, more and more people within the television industry are pointing to anecdotal evidence. Even Radha Subramanyam, Nielsen's SVP of Consumer Insights and Analytics, admits to us that there has to be *some* kind of relationship; it is just not one that can be simply defined "across the board":

> *A few years ago, people were claiming that 'social media and TV have no relationship at all. One has nothing to do with the other; so let's just ignore it and see what happens.' Then there was the other extreme school of thought that came up in the past year or two where people believe that 'every rating point and everything that happens in television comes as result of a friend referral or something that happened in social media.' And that's obviously not true either. We're seeing that there are obviously relationships, because these are two of the biggest areas in which people spend time in life and in culture; but they aren't simple relationships. Relationships vary quite significantly by age, in some cases by gender— and they vary a lot by the type of content.*

One such content type is clearly reality competitions, such as *The Voice*, which we profiled in Chapter 1. The program enjoyed remarkable integrated social media success, and the volume of backchannel conversation was incredibly high. NBC tracked the Nielsen rating as the show progressed while monitoring its social conversation, and network Senior Vice President of Strategic Digital and Broadcast Marketing Research Julie DeTraglia shared with us that there was a distinct relationship between Twitter mentions and *The Voice*'s ratings increases during the show's premiere episode:

> *It's very difficult to quantify the fact that any change you see in TV ratings comes from social media activity. But The Voice is a great example of an instance in which we did a tremendous amount of social outreach beforehand and then utilized a persistent Twitter hashtag that really helped to drive the conversation. We saw all of this Twitter activity during the premiere, and the ratings went up over the course of the night through each quarter hour. While we can't directly connect it, it's hard to deny there was some power at work.*

And the evidence continues to build. On October 6, 2011, Nielsen released results of a study it conducted across 250 television shows in which they analyzed how lifts in online show-related buzz connects with ratings. Nielsen concluded that not only *was* there a relationship, but they were even able to quantify it most significantly around premiere episodes. They found that a 9 percent increase in buzz a few weeks prior to a show's premiere equates to a 1

percent ratings point increase. For midseason episodes and finales, an online conversation lift of 14 percent is needed to accomplish a similar ratings increase.[14]

Since our own experiment back in 2010, companies who specialize in social TV ratings—and who use far more advanced methods of data collection and distillation—have emerged. While key television industry stakeholders can now utilize these tools to more readily gain access to data at a much greater scale, we are just at the beginning of the story that defines what social ratings actually mean—and how best to make them actionable.

# Bluefin Analyzes the Relationships between Impressions and Expressions

*Imagine a machine that watches all television, listens to the world's public social conversations, and connects the dots to create an insight engine that can be used to drive real-time decision-making where the integrity of the data is measurably sufficient that you can trust billions of dollars to be touched by that data.*

*—Deb Roy, Cofounder and CEO at Bluefin Labs*

Bluefin came out of "stealth mode" in February of 2011 and introduced one of its first products, called Bluefin Signals, which produces social TV analytics relevant to television networks, brands, and advertising agencies. Its system software, born out of MIT's media lab, has a number of inputs, including a satellite television feed that is literally watching television around the clock and digitally fingerprinting the content as it processes it. The closed captioning feed is another input that feeds the vocal dialog within a TV show verbatim, which can then be cross-referenced with the real-time social backchannel in order to make direct attributions to the given show.

When you add the channel guide data provided by Tribune Media to all of this, you have an incredibly tight system offered by Bluefin—one that analyzes communication patterns and data-driven context to define (with a fair amount of certainty) the probability that a tweet or public Facebook post relates to a specific television broadcast's content.

With fingerprinting on over 200 US broadcast and cable networks that represents over 210,000 individual telecasts, Bluefin is able to semantically analyze beyond TV *impressions* to understand the *expressions* consumers generate as they remark on content they are watching. As Bluefin's cofounder and CEO Deb Roy explained to us:

*You have a piece of television content that radiates through television networks and it makes impressions on members of an audience. People*

*have always talked about what they watch on TV. As long as there've been TV impressions, TV has always translated into social expressions; so the general pattern is impressions in, expressions out. But a lot of those expressions now have their own networks through which to radiate. Therefore, just like the TV content radiates through television networks to people, those people's social expressions are now radiating through the social graph to other people. So expressions are making impressions. If you and I were sitting on a couch together watching TV and I turn to you and mutter something, then my expression made an impression—end of story. But instead, I tweet it, and who knows how far and how long that expression will go. It's that seepage of private into public—and once it becomes public, you add to that another layer of technology such as Bluefin—this ability, at scale, to start understanding the cause and effect relationships between impressions and expressions. And that is what we think is the game changer.*

When one logs into Bluefin Signals, they first see a Summary Dashboard that displays a comparative view of television network trends (displayed as a line graph) over the past 30 days. Appearing below the trends are the most popular shows listed and grouped by broadcast and cable channels. Though the list defaults to the past week, it can also be toggled to filter by alternative date options. At the time that this was written, the top shows appearing within the Summary Dashboard include *Monday Night Football* on ESPN, *Glee* on Fox, and *The X Factor* on Fox (whose "social rating" score was tied with *Jersey Shore* on MTV).

The entire dashboard is fraught with rollovers and drilldowns that provide expansive data mining capabilities that expose a deeper level of information and insight. For example, users can view verbatim expressions for each show along with a tag cloud of popular keywords. Past conversation levels as well as connections to other TV shows are also available. Table views are easily sorted, and data can be exported to Excel for further manipulation.

Beyond the Summary Dashboard, an Audience Response feature lets users analyze metrics that include share of conversation and gender grouped by TV networks, individual shows, or genres within a specified date range. A number of filters are available for each of the data views, including dayparts and genres.

Bluefin Signals' Audience Connection feature visually maps out show-to-show or brand-to-show relationships using its data. For instance, of the set of people that Bluefin has identified as discussing hit show *Glee* during and around the time that an episode aired (using an arbitrary week that we chose), there was also a strong affinity by many of those same people for programs *Raising Hope* and *Karaoke Battle USA* during that same week. Bluefin is able to interpret and make these kinds of connections within the backchannel conversation.

A similar methodology also works for brands. A Bluefin Signals user can type in the name of a brand and see the top television shows discussed among

those who also discussed the brand during the given time period. Using the same week from our *Glee* example, we can also see that a popular QSR brand that will remain nameless has a strong affinity connection to *Boardwalk Empire* and the television broadcasts of movies *The Terminal* and *Batman Begins*.

In addition to brand names, Bluefin Signals can be mined by certain audience types such as "parents" or "coffee drinkers." This level of data-driven insight, at scale, is immensely powerful in the hands of TV networks who are seeking to uncover new advertisers, as well as brands trying to determine where else to buy ad space. It is highly unlikely that traditional methods used to do either task would yield the same results set. This should not be seen as alarming; instead it should be considered an opportunity to look at media and marketing plans differently by expanding the inputs used to inform them. The data that is generated by the collective mass of "social impressions" can now be used as a means to augment existing methods of insight gathering and decision making.

# Trendrr Was the First to Market with Social TV Ratings Charts

*Real-time data informs the TV stack in multiple ways. It informs it from the research perspective, and from an adverting and ad sales perspective. It informs it from a ratings and engagement perspective as well as from a production perspective. Each way is unique.*

*—Mark Ghuneim, CEO and Cofounder at Trendrr*

Back in 2005, Trendrr was known as Infofilter, a company focused predominantly on providing social media listening insights for marketers and agencies based on analytics from social bookmarking and photo sharing sites Delicious and Flickr (since Twitter did not exist at the time). Over the past several years, Trendrr grew its social media monitoring solution, and on April 4, 2011, they launched Trendrr.tv, making them the first to market with a specific product for "social TV ratings" in a chart form.

Trendrr.tv is currently powered using "fire hose" data from Twitter as well as check-in data from Miso and GetGlue, combined with public Facebook status updates. The site's free Social Television Charts display the top 10 cable and broadcast shows as measured by total activity of tweets, Facebook posts, and TV check-ins. Users can toggle back and forth between Trendrr.tv's daily or weekly charts depending on their preferred snapshot of data.

In addition to providing a given show's "social rating," Trendrr reports on the positive versus negative sentiment and activity loss or gain from the previous reporting period. While there are options to drill down into more detailed information, individuals must have a paid subscription to the service to

actually do so. The subscription allows users to access detailed show pages that break out activity by social network as well as gender. Two visual graphs display the program's Twitter activity through two viewing options of 24 hours or 30 days. Top geographic markets are also listed in rank order by the amount of activity that a given show produces. Top Twitter influencers—measured by their respective Klout scores (which is a measure of influence based on one's social engagement and amplification) are also included.

Trendrr allows its users to slice and mine its data on a macro level in a variety of ways, using a range of filters and sort functions. Additionally, by using natural language processing, Trendrr.tv is able to forecast most anticipated shows and help to elicit buzz about major tentpole TV events. For instance, toward the beginning of September of 2011, Trendrr.tv began publishing its list of most discussed fall TV pilots leading up to their premieres.[15] Early frontrunners included (in order): *Once Upon a Time* on ABC, *The Playboy Club* on NBC, *Revenge* on ABC, *Charlie's Angels* on ABC, and *The Secret Circle* on The CW.

Trendrr.tv also provides a set of curation tools that it uses in partnerships like "The Weather Channel Social," announced in August of 2011.[16] Based in part on the insight that Twitter users in the United States send about 200 weather-related tweets per minute (which can more-than-double on active weather days), the partnership brings tweets on-air as well as within The Weather Channel's online and mobile properties. Trendrr uses its social intelligence system to classify tweets to ensure they are actually about the weather, determine location, and filter out profanity.[17]

While Trendrr and Bluefin both offer solutions that produce social TV ratings, the resulting output can vary between the two due to their differences in data sources and algorithms. For instance, Trendrr reports *Glee* as the top broadcast and *Jersey Shore* as the top cable show, while Bluefin reports NFL Football and the GOP Debate, respectively—when comparing the same, randomly selected, week.

# SocialGuide Is More Than a Social TV Guide, It Also Provides Social TV Ratings

*I was looking at my Facebook and Twitter feeds and noticed that a lot of people were talking about TV, and that a lot of the conversation was about TV as TV was airing. I thought that if my friends and I are doing that for the shows we watch, it'd be interesting to find out how much conversation was happening across the entire linear TV landscape.*

*—Sean Casey, Founder and CEO at SocialGuide*

Though we first introduced SocialGuide in Chapter 2 within the context of social TV guides, the company has a dual role operating as a solution for social TV ratings *and* social TV analytics. Similar to Trendrr.tv's charts, SocialGuide publishes the Social 100, which is a publicly available ranking of the "100 most social programs" on television. It also publishes the most social in primetime, episodes, sports events, and networks. Using public application programming interfaces (APIs) from Facebook data and Twitter, SocialGuide's scope measures the social activity of 177 TV channels and on average measures over 4,000 unique programs per month—all of which is made possible by the company's partnership with Tribune Media (who also provides data to Bluefin Labs). The Social 100 is published weekly and monthly, while a top 10 list is posted daily on SocialGuide's website.[18]

The company also uses its data to power its enterprise-level social analytics tool called SocialGuide Intelligence, which allows users to view and mine of all the social activity that SocialGuide captures around US television programming. A user audience of TV networks, brands, and agencies is similarly defined by both Bluefin and Trendrr. SocialGuide Intelligence provides specific insight into social audience and influencers as well as offers network, program, and episode-level data.

# What Is the Ultimate Value of High Social TV Ratings?

*Measuring the conversation within social TV is a bit like the chicken and the egg situation: If you create something good on TV then, of course, people are going to talk about it. And if people start talking about it, of course, that stuff on TV is going to become amplified. So it's a bit of "which came first?" Most often, I think it's born out of good content on the TV screen itself.*

*—Ryan Osborn, Director of Social Media at NBC News*

In Chapter 1, we discussed the value of social impressions given the fact that they come with an inherent endorsement. Although not all social impressions carry an equal amount of influence (something that also varies by who receives them), there is no doubt that the backchannel is an influential entity. And while TV networks want to know if fostering voluminous backchannel conversations about their shows is helping ratings, Bluefin Labs' Deb Roy shares another question for stakeholders to consider:

*Does more tweeting lead to higher ratings, meaning audience size? I understand why that's a significant point of interest. Another related question is: what does it mean when you get varying levels of remarkability*

*for the same audience size? It's got to mean something. Let's say all being held equal: you know the demographics, you know everything you want to know about the people who are talking—and then you have two shows, each of which has 10 million viewers. In one case, 50,000 people talk; in another case, 500,000 talk. So what does that mean? And to whom? There are people on the content side, and then there are advertisers. I think it's got to mean something to each of them. If you like the answer that 500,000 means I get 10 times more something—which is of value to me— I'll then want to drive that number up, independent of impressions. It's not that I don't want more impressions as well; but they're separate dimensions in this scenario.*

The more people that engage on TV's backchannel, the higher the chances others online will discover and tune in, out of curiosity, to the programming getting the lion's share of buzz. The other major value proposition is that large backchannels produce a goldmine of insights that are ready and waiting to be surfaced. If TV networks and advertisers are not quite ready to make the leap by claiming that social media is good for ratings, then they can at least benefit from social ratings data as an input to strategy and planning decisions.

# Measuring the Backchannel Turns Raw Data into Useful Information

Bluefin took a look at the highest "social TV rated" episodes of a number of television shows (within the first three quarters of 2011) and examined what dominated the backchannel during the times that those particular episodes aired. The 6:00 pm (Eastern) airing of ESPN's *SportsCenter* on Sept 5, 2011 sparked its biggest backchannel conversation around the topic of Maryland's "ugly uniforms." The topic of same sex marriage in New York produced CNN's *Anderson Cooper 360*'s largest backchannel on June 24, 2011. And on May 2, 2011, TBS's *Conan* drove its highest social TV rating when guest star Will Ferrell shaved Conan's beard on-air.

Trendrr has found Hispanic/Latino American viewers to be a very vocal backchannel demographic. When comparing the social conversation levels between the Miss Universe versus Miss Universo pageants, Trendrr reported that the #missuniverso hashtag had three times the Twitter backchannel volume of the #missuniverse hashtag. Trendrr also compared the social ratings of *Glee*'s season two versus season three premieres to find a 40 percent drop in the size of the latter's Twitter backchannel, which also had a 29 percent drop in its Nielsen ratings.[19]

SocialGuide examined the season nine premiere of *Project Runway*, which aired on July 28, 2011, and found that 8 percent of the entire television

backchannel conversation was about *Project Runway* during the time that it aired. Eighty percent of the *Project Runway* premiere episode mentions occurred within a four-hour window of its linear broadcast airing—with 53 percent of the total conversation taking place during the show itself. Twitter @replies made up the bulk of the conversation—a statistic that indicates that *Project Runway*'s backchannel was more of a back-and-forth virtual coviewing experience, versus a bunch of one-way self-expressions.

Of course, while all of this information is interesting—and would surely make for terrific PowerPoint eye candy—it provides little value if it is not actionable enough to help inform decisions.

# How Advertisers Can Use the Backchannel's Insights for Decision Making

One of the ways that advertisers benefit most from social ratings tools is by measuring brand conversation lift and to find (and then target) engaged audiences. As we mentioned in Chapter 1, backchannel conversation is not limited to the television shows themselves; it also includes TV commercials.

For example—Diet Pepsi's "Beach Tweet" spot aired 746 times across 260 different television shows. Because Bluefin's video fingerprinting technology also encompasses commercials, they were able to isolate a control and exposed group in order to measure brand conversation lift.

The exposed group consisted of 1,800,000 people who watched and posted about any of the television shows wherein the Diet Pepsi commercial aired on the backchannel. The control group, which was comprised of 2,200,000 people, was defined similarly; however, it was done before the Diet Pepsi campaign began. By measuring pre- and post-brand mentions for "Diet Pepsi" within the backchannel, Bluefin was able to calculate a 19 percent brand conversation lift among the exposed audience. This kind of measurement begins to leverage the notion of a feedback loop the likes of which television has traditionally never had.

This leads into the second key social ratings use case for advertisers. We are all aware by now that certain kinds of TV shows are more apt to generate fuller bodied backchannels. As Nielsen's Radha Subramanyam puts it, "Social has varying impact depending on the kind of content you have. If it's a broadcast drama, it may be a very successful show; but chances are the extra lift you get from social is going to be less."

The same is true for television commercials. Brands that integrate lean-forward experiences into their TV spot creative are much more apt to have greater participatory success when placed in target-appropriate, lean-forward television shows. Once a TV viewer is already engaged on the second screen due

to the nature of the actual program, they do not have to mentally (or physically) shift gears when an equally matched lean-forward TV commercial follows.

Using social TV ratings tools to find and assess lean-forward versus lean-back television programming gives media planners and buyers another dimension on which to evaluate advertising opportunities based on a campaign's objectives and the nature of its creative.

We can take this idea a step further by mapping and analyzing affinity relationships. In the case of the Diet Pepsi Beach Tweet example, Bluefin found two times the amount of brand mentions on television shows where its Signals product revealed a high affinity for Diet Pepsi versus low affinity shows where the TV spot also aired.

While social TV ratings charts give people a sense of the television shows that produce the biggest backchannels, it is important to keep in mind that those shows may not be appropriate for a particular brand's target, message, or core values. By using tools that map affinity relationships, advertisers are able to get brand-specific social TV ratings that are far more valuable as an input for decision making.

# TAKE ACTION: SOCIAL RATINGS

Nielsen data continues to be an important source for media buying decision makers; however, it does not have to be a single source. Summarized in the following list are three key ways to take advantage of the insights that social media can generate to benefit your media planning and buying strategies.

1. *Take a test drive*. If you are a part of an advertising agency that does not yet have access to Bluefin, Trendrr, or SocialGuide, you are missing out on a wealth of information that can help you and your clients. One of the best ways to get a sense for how each of these tools works—as well as the kind of data they produce—is to give them a try using actual TV campaign examples that you have running in-market. Each offers different pricing models and, as we illustrated, takes a different approach to social audience measurement.

2. *Conduct experiments*. The list of TV shows where your brand should be (according to social media data) will look different from the list of shows resulting from traditional media planning practices. If a target-appropriate television series bubbles to the top of the social ratings analysis that is low (or nonexistent) on the latter list, conduct a test by placing the TV spot and comparing backchannel chatter across media buys against the different series and networks where your creative is running.

3. *Appraise your social currency*. What are social impressions worth to your brand? In Chapter 1, we described the amplification that can result from these kinds of impressions. We see a promising halo effect that occurs when a brand's nonchoice-based TV spots end up generating lots of positive choice-based social impressions. If these are, indeed, valuable to your brand, you now have another dimension on which to optimize your creative and media buys.

# The Data Pool of Social Impressions Is Growing In Both Size and Value

The size of television's collective backchannel is only going to continue to increase as more and more people join and engage on the social networks and services that feed it. As this happens, the data pool by which to measure social TV ratings becomes richer and more representative of the masses. And this, in turn, leads to better insights, which help to produce more resonant content.

# Scan for More

Scan this QR code using your mobile device for videos and visuals of the examples and cases referenced throughout this chapter.



Don't have a smartphone with a QR reader app? No problem. You can access companion content directly by going to http://www.socialtvbook.net/tagged/chapter5.

# Notes

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# *Chapter 6*

## *Bridge Content*

### *Driving Engagement In-Between Episode Airings*

Television audiences met Southfork Ranch's Ewing family for the first time on Sunday, April 2, 1978 while watching a five-part miniseries called *Dallas* that was broadcast on CBS.[1] In the end, however, there was nothing "mini" about the series; Dallas ended its 357-episode run exactly 13 years, one month, and a day later.

The now-famed TV show dramatized the extravagant, complicated, and shady lives of a fictitious eight-member dynasty who got their wealth from the family oil business started by patriarch John "Jock" Ewing Senior. His eldest son, John "J. R." Ewing Junior—Ewing Oil's hardnosed CEO—quickly became the series' main focal point, and for good reason: His character was brilliantly written in a way such that viewers could not help but love and hate him at the same time.

The end of *Dallas*' second season (or third, if you count the miniseries) would go on to set the stage for a major moment in television history. The episode, entitled "A House Divided," was broadcast on Friday, March 21, 1980 —the same day that President Jimmy Carter announced a US boycott of the Moscow Summer Olympics.[2] It soon became clear that the buzz around a fictitious TV narrative would trump a current real-world event among the general public.

In the final 112 seconds of that infamous season finale, audiences find J. R. working late at his office high-rise. Except for the spot illumination of a bankers' desk lamp, it is otherwise quite dark inside. The phone rings: "J. R. Ewing here," he answers—but is met with only silence on the other end. "Hello?" J. R. asks, but hears just two quick clicks, followed by the stark sound of a dial tone.

After about a minute of viewers watching J. R. mull around his office, the camera suddenly fades to black as the ominous sound of footsteps are heard.