(i)TV Brings People Together?
How the Feeling of Togetherness Can Be Build

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ABSTRACT

Interactive television is becoming more and more socialized and it is no longer just a TV. There are numerous ways and technologies to interact with the TV (Parikka 2004; Jensen & Toscan 1999). There are also different viewpoints regarding what is interactive, what the level of interaction is, and furthermore, where today's television may be located on this dimension. What is iTV's role in building feelings of togetherness between people?

Categories and Subject Descriptors:

H.5.2 **[INFORMATION INTERFACES AND**

PRESENTATION]: User Interfaces – evaluation/methodology, user-centered design, graphical user interfaces (GUI)

General Terms: Design, Human Factors

Keywords: iTV-chats, cross media, togetherness, school shootings

1. INTRODUCTION

The current study of iTV entertainment (chats, TV mobile games, call quizzes) started in year 2004 and it consists of 30 hours of taped iTV formats and internet inquiry. (Tuomi 2008) The particular case-study (started in 2009) deals with the TV-chat broadcasted when the second school shooting occurred in Finland, 23.9.2008. The different aspects of togetherness were analyzed and discussed to answer these questions: What are the different most common motives and themes that create feeling of collectiveness? Which aspects of the social communication foster the feeling of togetherness? What is characteristic for this type of mediated interaction? What can be learned from it when developing better social communication systems? What different dimensions can be found in an abnormal situation such as media catastrophe? These questions were answered by analyzing the iTV field and text messages sent on the day of the school shooting. This analyzed data gives information how and why people might use TV screen as a collective and social meeting place.

Nowadays different technologies are becoming closer and closer to each other. Still, today's TV and the net are only converging at some level. How is it possible that Finnish people chose chargeable TV-chat (approximately 1 €/message) over free crisis-chat on the net on the day another school shooting took place[1]? Both, TV and the net, allow a lot of people to join in simultaneously and it is fairly easy to do so, using the keyboard or SMS-message. Both of them also offer the possibility to anonymity, the level to attend is not very high. It is risk free and it respects the privacy of the user. The biggest differences between the TV and the net are the use of the live host on TV-chats and the chargeability of these iTV formats, especially compared to chats on the net. (Tuomi 2008)
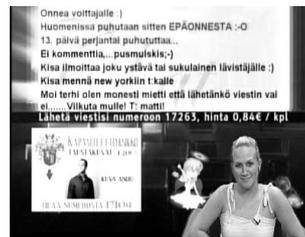
2. CONTEXT
2.1 Background

Figure 1. Human-Hosted TV-Chat

iTV-entertainment has quite a wide history. It has changed during the years but it is still going on strong which have probably surprised the game developers and TV-channels as well. At first, one could participate in different TV-chats (from the year 2000) – one could send greetings with a text message (SMS) and almost immediately see his/her text on the TV-screen. See figure 1.This new form of entertainment soon became adopted by SMS game show producers. From the year 2002 there have been different kinds of TV-mobile games on television. At first they were games one could participate in with a text message – just by choosing the right coordinates to hit a certain target. Games were often based on problem solving and the interaction between the player and the game was limited to text messaging. Later on (2004), games developed further and a live human host stepped onto the playing field. For example, games were based on getting a football past the host or trying to hit her with a snowball. Since the participation took place via SMS or IVR[2], literally all viewers were able to participate. The level of interaction grew enormously, especially after the chat-function was added to the games. Now it

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[1] There were crisis-chats on the net. For example: www.irc-galleria.net

[2] Interactive voice response is a phone technology that allows a computer to detect voice and touch tones using a normal phone call

was possible to play against a live host and talk to him/her – and most importantly: to get a response to one's action (Tuomi 2008).

iTV is still developing; most importantly via different convergences and divergences with other media technologies. With the advance of Internet and Web technologies, the increasing accessibility of mobile devices, the prevalence of rich media contents, and the ensuing social, economic, and cultural changes, technology and applications have evolved quickly over the past decade (Wang & Zeng et al. 79, 2007). Still, the basic iTV-formats can show us a way. The iTV experience, from social and individual point of view, is usually built on synchronous activity. Discussion forums on the net are based on asynchronous communication but this type of activity would not work on TV, because people especially want to attend and intervene on the broadcast flow. The possibility to attend and influence on a TV-format, especially real-time, is still, after ten years, something people seem to desire[3] (Tuomi 2008). Instant interaction is best seen in cross media formats. Cross media entertainment means connection between mobile devices, Internet or/and television – the same contents are used in different platforms. Cross media enables for example gaming experiences between TV and mobile phones (Kangas 2004, 140). This paper focuses mainly on TV-chats and feeling of togetherness build on a TV-screen.

2.2 TV-Centred Communication?

What about the level of communication between the spectator and TV? How it has changed during the years and what could be predicted based on this knowledge? We are used to categorize communication and interaction at least from three different angles; interaction between humans, between a machine and a human and between machines (Isotalus 1998, 176). Interaction can traditionally be divided also into interpersonal communication, mediated communication and quasi-mediated communication. Usually TV and its stars and hosts are only trying to create simulation of interaction between spectators and the TV (Isotalus 1998, 177). Nowadays iTV-shows enable two-way traffic between audience and TV via chat-functions. (Tuomi 2008) All the previous research seems to pin point the fact that TV lacks in a real time-communication (Näränen 2006). That is not the case anymore, because people are able to communicate with the TV and a person on it.

That is why we should be talking about the fourth way of communicating which could be *real-time based mediated interaction/two way-synchronous communication[4]* which highlights the interpersonal features of today's iTV. Of course we cannot define this form of communication interpersonal, not yet. Reasons for this are the facts that the TV-persons, in chat-function formats, are entitled to choose which messages they want to handle, the censorship of these formats limits the outcome seen from the TV-screen and you cannot force a TV-person to communicate with you by grapping his/her sleeve. The level of interaction has changed, but not yet to the point where we could talk about interpersonal communication. Anyway, the real-time based mediated interaction that chat-functions enable is a significant feature in today's interactive participation TV-formats.

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[3] Internet inquiry (35 questions and approximately 96 answerers) concerning iTV-entertainment (2008).

[4] Author's incomplete definition (Tuomi 2009).

3. THE ASPECTS THAT BUILD FEELING OF TOGETHERNESS

A qualitative study of creating feeling of togetherness and social interaction between Finnish people in this particular case consists of approximately 3 hours of taped TV-chat from 23. September 2008. The current research method is qualitative content analysis and the research is based on analysis of the numerous chat messages[5]. This research examines data as a case study; observation results and descriptive analyses make it possible to understand and define this phenomenon. This paper presents a classical case of collective behaviour stimulated by iTV. This is an interesting and worthy subject to study. Firstly, TV-chats could be seen a bit old-fashioned and they could have already vanished, which they have not. Secondly, TV chats being a place for sharing feelings of community and togetherness in 2008 is surprising. We have entered the era of web 2.0 which offers hundreds of social media applications where people can attend communities, almost for free (only costs are usually broadband-fees) The idea of social TV concept (including the old and newer inventions) will probably have to struggle with the net.

3.1 Chat-host as a Peer Support

Interactive entertainment has brought to life a new kind of TV-host culture. (Tuomi 2008) An iTV-host is very active and demanding on the viewers. The iTV-host is in the position of activating consumers to gain as many participants as possible. In this new iTV-host culture it is possible to communicate with the "TV-stars" by text messaging (SMS) and mainly because of this, there are different roles played by iTV-hosts. One role of the host is to be a peer support for the participating audience (Tuomi 2008). The dialog between the hosts and the players often consists of questions concerning dating and adult matters. Especially young people like to follow TV programs that are directed to people older than themselves and that handle issues of young grown-ups (Von Feilitzen, 2004).

"Mikko left me yesterday and I've been crying the whole day and night!" Host:" He wasn't worth it, tell him to jump off the cliff! Nelli (the host) is here as a relationship therapist" (**MADX Tennis**, summer 2006)

Still, it is also seen that older people rely on hosts' opinions when in doubt.

"I'm devastated! I caught my man cheating on me, again! What should I do??? (MTV3 Chat, 2007)

If participating costs could be reduced, iTV formats could turn into "legitimate" channels for advice and help (with the use of real experts). Such as public therapy, doctor's consultation, maternity clinic etc. There really is a need for this kind of a service, in health care for example[6] (Tuomi 2008).

3.2 A Collective Space to Share Feelings

On the 23 of September 2008 Finland experienced yet another awful tragedy when the second school shooting took place in

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[5] Approximately 390 chat messages.

[6] 18.07.2008: http://www.poliklinikka.fi/?page=7874754&id=245669

Kauhajoki. The killer was able to kill 10 innocent victims and himself at the end of the day. At the same time when the first news started to reach Finnish people, the *Mtv3 Chat* was on air. During this day and the next morning chats were full of messages concerning the shooting. Generally TV-chats became less of social activity since the host was added to formats. In the early chats people used to chat with each other and that is why chats were often described as a collective, social activity on TV screen. After the iTV formats started using human hosts, most of the messages started to be aimed at the hosts. (Tuomi 2008) All of this change when something similar to school shootings happens. So, this was not a new phenomenon, this had happened before in 2004 when the tsunami stroked and in 2007 when the first school shooting occurred. In 2008, people were still using TV chats s a collective place to grief and discuss. TV chats become places where feeling of togetherness is constantly reproduced.

SMS-messages from those days are easily categorized and this data shows us how collectiveness and togetherness can be produced on a TV screen and between people who do not know each other. SMS-messages from that day can be divided into: 1) feeling of horror expressed in the messages, 2) informative and questioning messages, 3) scapegoat and blaming messages, 4) solution messages, 5) aggressive messages, 6) messages from the people in Kauhajoki and 7) sympathetic messages.

1) Feeling of horror expressed in the messages
What has happened to Finland? Is killing really the only way to seek for attention?

2) Informative and questioning messages
Could someone please tell me, did anyone die there??

3) Scapegoat and blaming messages
TV and the net teach children violence. Or is Big brother suitable for children in your opinion?

4) Solution messages
Metal detectors and guards to schools, now!!

5) Aggressive messages
I hope the shooter will live.. God damnit.. We will put the boy pay for his actions!

6) Messages from the people in Kauhajoki
We, close relatives, don't know anything what is going on in that school where our family members are..

7) Sympathetic messages
Our deepest condolences! Family from Joensuu

TV chats have clear connection points to internet's discussion forums. They both have peer supportive role and value. All the messages above support community and mutual thinking patterns. People gather together as group on a TV screen against evil. Sense of togetherness can be build by sharing common grief. Sharing the grief and the shock often turn into symbolic action, which can be seen as media rituals (Couldry 2003). Ritual communication consists of producing, sharing and maintaining community (Carey 1994, 81-97).

4. CONCLUSIONS

This paper presented a descriptive study of iTV-sociality and collectivism among the audience. In conclusion, people get feeling of togetherness when they have a mutual agenda whether it is joy or grief. There are also ways to socialize in front of the TV with friends by playing game consoles. Today's console games seem to follow a certain pattern; social game-play. Nintendo Wii is based on social activity – let's play together. This can also be seen in different family/friends quizzes like in Buzz. This could be seen as a phenomenon when people are graving after social communities, even in gaming situations. This could also be a new wave of arcade phenomenon where people gather together, even leaving their homes to play together and capture social gaming situations on a shared TV-screen. It is not rare bars and pubs to have Sing Stars et cetera. In conclusion, it is clear that people feel TV as some kind of a mystical machine, yet in 21st century. When attending or influencing on TV, it feels special. Whether it is sending SMS to the TV-screen or playing on it. We are, still, used to idea that TV is a one way broadcast medium and when being able to step on a flow; it feels as we are breaking a magic and public boundary (Tuomi 2008).

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