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Burak Polat & Cem Sefa Sütçü

Television Ratings Got Social: A Case Study on The Famous Turkish TV Series Muhteşem Yüzyıl

Introduction

Since the 1960s, television (TV) is the primary medium of information for the masses. The global attention on TV medium generates its own system that can be simply represented with four components: audience, broadcaster, producer, and advertiser. The producer creates the content, the broadcaster televises the content, and the advertiser invests in the content; all three components rely on the audience's decision to watch the content. All three of these components, producer, broadcaster, and advertiser, have their own sub-systems. Their objectives are intersected in some points and separated in others; however, like every organisation, their fundamental objectives are survival and growth.

The survival and growth of an organisation comes with decision-making, decision-making comes with knowledge, and knowledge comes with information; thus, for better decision-making in the TV system, audience measurement is needed. TV ratings are the worldwide standard for audience measurement that basically indicates the viewership rate of TV content in a specific time span.

Since 1973 when TV ratings had been obtained on a daily basis (Celebrating 90 years of Innovation, 2013), rating of TV content refers to the percentage of TV households that watched that content and one rating point equals one percent of the total TV audience (Poltrack, D., 1983, p. 121). When taking the hundreds of billion-dollar size of the market into consideration, the accuracy and accountability of TV ratings are extremely crucial.

In December 2011, the law enforcement officials detected a TV ratings fraud scandal in Turkey. AGB Nielsen's (formerly authorised TV audience measurement company for Turkey’s TV market) 1,070 subjects of approximately 2,500 households in Turkey were leaked and the rating system was open to manipulation (Hurriyet Daily News, 2011). Even the authorised company has changed; today, the Turkish TV market is still questioning the reliability of TV ratings.

For creating more effective and reliable TV audience measurement, social media has a great potential. As Housley et al. (2014) mentioned in their article
titled "Big and broad social data and the sociological imagination: a collaborative response" (p. 12):

"...Developments linked to the emergence of big and broad social data are happening rapidly, and we cannot be certain what impact it will have on research processes. It is possible that it will promote the use of computational social science methods in place of more traditional quantitative and qualitative research methods. It may also influence thinking and re-orientate social research around new objects, populations and techniques. However, we think it is most desirable that new methods be used in conjunction with the existing ones, to make research richer and more nuanced, and we have attempted to motivate this synthesis through examples of our current research summarised above. The analysis of social processes as they actually happen is bound to give researchers insights and interesting avenues to explore that are absent from the official construction of events that is available via traditional research instruments and curated datasets..."

By reference to Housley et al., with using social media as a source of big and broad social data, conventional TV audience measurement methods can be transformed. In this paper, the transformation of viewership with the impact of social media is first emphasised. Then, for better decision-making and a reliable TV audience measurement system, social media's potential is shared. Furthermore, content analysis of tweets of a famous Turkish TV series, Muhteşem Yüzyıl, is conducted. At last, the paper concludes with several discussions on social media's position for TV audience measurement.

**Social Media, TV, and TV Ratings**

Social media can be defined as the social interaction among people in which they create, share, or exchange information and ideas in virtual communities and networks (Ahlgvist et al., 2008). Social media is an interactive and digital new media that makes users relatively free of time and space boundaries. The attributes of social media transform passive TV audiences into active users and new conceptions rise such as "multi-screening" and "time shift."

Multi-screening is simply watching TV in company with at least one other device such as a smart phone, Tablet PC, laptop, etc. Time shift implies time independency for watching TV content. Today, individuals watch TV content whenever they want and wherever they want in company with several devices that allow them to create, share, and interact with the TV content. The transformation in TV watching behaviours and the digital attribute of social media constitutes a great potential for audience measurement because the users reactions to TV content can be gathered and analysed. Nielsen, despite
their reputation in Turkey, launched “Twitter TV Ratings” in the United States of America in October 2013. According to Nielsen’s (2013) definition, it is “the first-ever measure of the total activity and reach of TV-related conversation on Twitter, enable users to improve media planning and buying, measure effectiveness and identify true influencers.” In Turkey, there are two companies, Kimola and Somera, which are focused on social media research for the TV industry. Nielsen, Kimola, and Somera all are conducting research studies on Twitter, an online social networking and micro-blogging service that enables users to send and read short 140-character messages called tweets.

There are three main reasons to focus on Twitter as a medium for TV audience measurement in social media:

1. Multi-screeners' & time-shifters' tweets: Conventional methodology on TV audience measurement cannot cover the viewers that access TV content online. The tweets that are created by multi-screeners and time-shifters are creating a significant potential for audience measurement.

2. Application User Interface (API): API is a set of routines, protocols, and tools for building software applications. (Beal) Twitter API allows third parties to integrate with Twitter’s database within a set of rules and limits that allow researchers to gather data.

3. Public User Data: Twitter users, especially teens and young adults, tend to share content publicly (Madden et al., 2013). Since private data cannot be gathered, public data availability is crucial.

The metadata of a tweet and a user provide almost all the necessary data for TV ratings; however, the lack of demographic data prevents Twitter TV Ratings from fulfilling the requirements for being an alternative TV ratings system. Nevertheless, Twitter TV Ratings can be seen as complementary to conventional TV ratings with the potential of creating insights out of the data gathered.

Content Analysis on Muhtesem Yuzyl’s Twitter Data

To determine how Twitter data can be used for TV programs and audience measurement, Muhtesem Yuzyl has been chosen as one of the most famous Turkish TV series. We conducted content analysis for tweets about the program that are gathered by Kimola, one of the social media research companies that focuses on social media TV audience measurement.

Muhtesem Yuzyl (Magnificent Century) is a prime-time historical Turkish soap opera TV series with four seasons and 139 episodes based on the story of the reign of Suleiman the Magnificent. According to Turkey’s Culture and Tourism
Ministry Copyright Division (OdaTV, 2012), Muhteşem Yüzyıl has 150 million viewers across 75 countries.

19,703 tweets are gathered for Muhteşem Yüzyıl’s last four episodes (136th–139th) during the days that the show aired from 20:00 to 00:00. The distribution of gathered tweets is shown in Table 1.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>All Tweets</th>
<th>Unique Tweets</th>
<th>Users</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>21.05.2014</td>
<td>1,152</td>
<td>710</td>
<td>943</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28.05.2014</td>
<td>2,494</td>
<td>1,745</td>
<td>1,950</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>04.06.2014</td>
<td>5,746</td>
<td>3,127</td>
<td>4,487</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.06.2014</td>
<td>10,311</td>
<td>5,511</td>
<td>8,288</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Content analysis on the 136th episode’s tweets has been applied to visualise the tweet frequency patterns, to examine the relationship between tweets and TV program’s content, to determine topics and significant phrases that users tweet about, and to determine compliments and complaints about the TV program.

**Results of the content analysis**

- 42% of the overall activity happened between the 22:45–23:30 timespan that also covers the last parts of the episode.
- 30% of the overall activity is directly related to the episode’s plot.

*Figure 1: Gray graph: tweet frequency; black graph: directly relevant tweets to the aired TV content (x-axis: timespan from 20:00 to 00:00; y-axis: tweet quantity)*
• Tweets are scored according to their positiveness and compared with the tweet frequency; a weak but positive correlation is obtained (R=0.3701, p=0.108229).
• 5% of the total users (47 users) created 22% of the overall tweets and 14% of these users do not exist now.
• 5% of the overall tweets (60 tweets) constitute 20% of the overall dataset.
• Phrases on declaration of viewing (start, follow, time, etc.) constitute 10% of the overall tweets gathered and 23% of these tweeted occurred between 20:45–21:00, just before the episode started. Tweets about the finale (139th episode) constitute 8% of the overall content and these tweets were mostly tweeted (54% of the tweets about the finale) between the 23:10 to 23:30 timespan.
• 10% of the overall content is strictly irrelevant to the TV program's content; 70% of irrelevant tweets are about TV ratings, spam links constitutes 20%, and retweet requests constitutes 10% of the overall strictly irrelevant tweets.
• As is shown in Table 2, 36% of the compliments are about the soundtracks of the show, while acting and the scenario are the secondary topics for compliments. 36% of complaints are on defective reflection of the history; the use of language and negative effect of the show on society are the other significant topics for complaints.

Table 2: Tweets with compliments and complaints

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Compliments</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Soundtrack</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acting</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plot</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Channel</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>199</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of Unique Tweets</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Complaints</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Misinformation</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Language</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Negative Effect</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plot</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Acting</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advertisement</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Production</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Channel</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>% of Unique Tweets</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
- In the 136th episode, tweets about Prince Beyazid constitute 34% of the overall tweets on characters. Mustafa, Hürrem, and Pargali were former strong characters of the show; however, a considerable amount of users still tweet about them.

Table 3: Tweets about characters

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rank</th>
<th>Characters</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Beyazid</td>
<td>33.91%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Süleyman</td>
<td>18.70%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Mustafa</td>
<td>13.04%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Selim</td>
<td>7.39%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Ebusuud</td>
<td>6.96%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Hürrem</td>
<td>6.96%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Mihrimah</td>
<td>4.78%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Rüstem</td>
<td>2.61%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Fahriye</td>
<td>2.17%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Şah Sultan</td>
<td>1.74%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Lala</td>
<td>1.30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Pargali</td>
<td>0.43%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Discussion

Twitter TV Ratings cannot be seen as the ultimate TV rating system, but it can be seen as complementary for TV audience measurement. The public data that Twitter users create about TV programs allow researchers to determine the impact of the TV program and also to detect insights from the audience.

The lack of demographic data is the primary issue that makes Twitter TV Ratings weak relative to conventional TV ratings, especially from the media planners' point of view. As a condition for the development of a new social media platform that is widely adopted, for providing feasible audience metrics to create a TV rating system, demographic data of users should be available.

The conventional methodology, people metre, is still a worldwide standard for TV audience measurement. Authorised TV rating research companies should monitor and analyse the chosen households' social media usage during the act of viewing. Also, converging the people metre methodology with social media measurement (User metre - Choosing social media users that watch TV, Social TV viewers, for creating an universe from these users to monitor and measure the audience) can generate an alternative TV ratings system.
Essentially, TV ratings are needed for better decision-making in the TV industry. With monitoring and measuring audiences in social media, insights will be obtained and with insights, there will better decision-making.

With fully digitalised TV infrastructure and integration with social media, there will obviously be more accurate, reliable, and effective audience measurement.

References


