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IS THE SECOND SCREEN BECOMING THE FIRST? AN EXPLORATORY STUDY OF EMERGING MULTI-SCREENING PRACTICES

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ABSTRACT

The proliferation of mobile devices with internet access, along with increasing rates of adoption of smartphones and tablets, are resulting in the emergence of new use practices, among which simultaneous activities in different screened-devices. This paper discusses the concept of 'second screening', usually referring to using the mobile phone while watching television and suggesting that the TV is the main focus of attention, advocating 'multi-screening' instead, as there are several different binomials of simultaneous activities in screened-media, most of which involve the smartphone as the preponderant medium, and that may be simultaneous, sequential or alternate. Triangulating results from an online survey to multi-screeners and from interviews to relevant industry stakeholders, our research identifies emerging
multi-screening practices, the motivations behind them, and the preponderance of smartphones as the most engaging medium.
This paper results from the first stage of an ongoing project on multi-screening that aims to explore new business models and offers related both to platforms and to content, trying to match the industry's offers to the users' needs, preferences and expectations.

KEYWORDS

Multi-screening, smartphone, tablet, television, mediation, use practices

1. INTRODUCTION

The importance of screens in contemporary society has been highlighted by several authors within Media Studies, such as Marshall McLuhan, Jean Baudrillard and Gilles Lipovetsky. Plus, screened media are increasingly proliferating, as computers and mobile phones are already widespread, and the penetration rates of smartphones and tablets are increasing at considerable speed.

The concept of second screening, usually referring to the use of laptops or mobile phones during television viewing, puts the digital media in a supporting role, as the less relevant activity of a multitasking process that revolves around watching television. However, the proliferation and penetration of other screened devices with internet connection, such as smartphones and tablets, has resulted in an increase of multitasking, and also in other activities binomials that do not necessarily include the television. Alternative expressions to 'second screening' have been suggested to describe the intensification and variation of this practice, namely 'connected viewer', 'social TV' and 'multi-screening', terms that do not establish an hierarchy between the media resulting from their attention capturing or engaging ability.

Our paper explores, in a more generic matter, emergent use practices related to second screening. It reports on an exploratory study aimed to identify the most common binomials of second screening practices and the motivations behind them. This study is an introductory part of a broader project whose goal is to identify emergent audiences' practices and preferences as a framework for the discussion of users' profiles, to identify relevant criteria for users' segmentation according to activities, benefits seeked and media choice, and also to discuss new and integrated media offers and business models in the news industry.

At the same time, our work discusses the argument that television is no longer the main focus of attention in second screening practices. Thus, we prefer the term multi-screening to describe the phenomenon in study, as it doesn't express preponderance of one medium over the other. In fact, we argue that smartphones are actually becoming the 'first screen', not only because they are more often the focus of attention, but also because they are the common denominator in a varied set of second screening activities that may or may not include television watching.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 From Second Screening to Multi-Screening

The concept of 'second screen' was used for the first time to refer to the simultaneous use of two or more computer screens connected to the same laptop/desktop. Later, the same expression was used to describe the emerging practice of using more than one screened media, i.e. a mobile phone, while watching television. Since that moment, the concept of second screen has increasingly become part of everyday life dictionary to mention the act of television viewing, as the preponderant activity and, for that, absorbing most of users' attention and engagement, while using other device to perform complement activities or occupy free moments, such as commercial breaks.

However, other concepts related to the same phenomena have been suggested such as multi-screening, dual screening, social television and connected viewing, among others (e.g. Google, 2012a; Eriksson Consumer Lab, 2012; Lee, 2012; Smith and Boyles, 2012; Nielsen, 2014). These more recent concepts do not establish a hierarchy between the media being used simultaneously neither limit themselves to a particular binomial – television and mobile phone. Furthermore, they even consider the possibility of using more than two screened media at the same time.

2.2 Multi-screening Emergent Practices

The notion of multi-screening addresses the fact that there are other possible screened-media binomials besides television and mobile phone, i.e. mobile phone and desktop, mobile phone and laptop, television and tablet, laptop and television, mobile phone and music player, and others.

Lee (2012) presents the concept of dual screening as a variation of second screening, to refer the simultaneous use of two screened-media. The author rejects the preponderance of a medium over the other, arguing that attention tends to be distributed among them in an interactive and dynamic manner, depending on triggers and engagement.

The concept of social television (Eriksson Consumer Lab, 2012) has been suggested to describe a particular type of second screening in which there is an important component of social networking simultaneously to television viewing, that occurs in social networks sites such as Facebook, Twitter, Whatsapp, Instagram, among others, or in television-related mobile applications. This study indicates that 62% of US TV viewers use social media while watching TV. Television-related applications may focus both on a television channel or on a particular content, whatever the case, these mobile applications tend to have social features, i.e. interact with other users by commenting the contents, in addition to other functions such as providing information and interacting with TV content.

Also, another relevant concept is connected viewing (Smith and Boyles in Pew Internet Research, 2012) that is more focused on consumer behavior and aims to characterize all the different activities that are performed through mobile devices while watching television. A Pew Internet Research study with a representative sample of the US population showed that the most frequent activity is keeping busy during commercial breaks, followed by non-TV related activities such as checking the email, web browsing and download apps. Other TV-related activities that are also frequent included checking whether something they heard on TV is true or not (22%), search what other people are saying about television content (20%) and commenting online about the content (19%) and, with a less frequent use, voting for a reality show or contest (6%).

The study distinguishes between connected viewing and distracted viewing by arguing that the first concept is more frequent for smartphone users and requires a connection between watching TV and smartphone activities, and the second refers to mobile phone users who use the device to keep busy while the television content is not engaging their attention. In what concerns connected viewing, television content is usually the trigger for smartphone activities such as researching or social interactions. To distracted viewers, the activities performed are unrelated to the television content and usually end up drawing the attention from the TV completely.

On the same issue, it is also relevant the distinction from mobile devices as companions or as enhancers (Eriksson Consumer Lab, 2012). As companions, people use mobile phones simultaneously with TV viewing but there is no connection between those activities, i.e. playing a game on mobile phone while listening to news on TV. Although, as enhancers, people watch TV while they interact with applications that are related to the channel or content they watching. This enhances the TV experience by adding it a social layer, extra information or allowing participation.

Also, there are two types of multi-screening, either simultaneous or sequential. Simultaneous consists on using more than media at the same time for either related or an unrelated activity, while sequential deals with the phenomena of moving from one media to another different (Google, 2012b). It is also relevant to highlight that the smartphone is the device most frequently involved in multi-screening activities (57% of the time spent using a smartphone is simultaneous with other activity and the most common activity performed at the same time than using a mobile phone is watching TV, with 52%) (Google, 2012a). Also, each second-screened media is chosen according to goals and context and is preferred for certain types of activities, i.e. computers for work, television for information, smartphones for connectedness and tablets for entertainment.

A recent report from Nielsen (2014) argues that 84% of mobile device's owners use them while watching television, claiming there is a two-screen minimum needed to satisfy their needs of simultaneous social interaction, information, entertainment and sense of productivity and accomplishment.

Summing up, recent research points to: a) an increasing multi-screening behavior; b) smartphones being the device most frequently involved in multi-screening behavior; and c) smartphones as ever-present companions and experience enhancers that are therefore preponderant relatively to other media. These insights support our argument that smartphones are actually the first screen – the most important one and the most frequent focus of attention.

2.3 Multi-screening, Behavior and Cognition

Multi-screening emergent practices are better understood within the framework of previous research on: a) mobile phone use, mediation and effects, as the smartphone is the preponderant medium in multiscreening; b) changes in media consumer behavior; and c) digital technologies' effects on human cognition.

The notion of the mobile phone being a sort of 'companion' or 'extension' of its user is present from early research on its use and impact. Ling (2004) compares the mobile phone to a 'teddy bear' while Vincent (2005) considers it an 'affective technology', i.e. the mediator of emotions and thus the object of an affective relation for its user. In addition, Dias (2008) presents the mobile phone as an extension of both the self and others as, on the one hand, it enhances human abilities of communicating and organizing – as the Swiss Army knife that it is (Fortunati, 2002) – and also of expressing identity and group belonging, and on the other hand, it is an extension of perpetual contact with others (Katz and Aakhus, 2003), who seem to be 'inside' the mobile phone. Smartphones and multi-screening practices take these roles of the mobile phone – companion and enhancer – one step further by articulating with other media use experiences.

Concerning consumer behavior, the term 'prosumer' to designates a paradigmatic shift from relatively passive consumption to use practices based on interaction, dialogue, participation and (co)creation. This notion has been further developed, among others, by Tapscott (2008), with his characterization of the net generation as demanding and participating consumers, and by Castells (2009), with his view of networked individualism as new media use practices that are at the same time networked and focused on each individual user, that manages his network and his activity according to his own needs, goals and preferences.

Research also shows that digital immersion, i.e. the frequent and intense use of digital media, results in cognitive changes. Recent research has been focused mainly on Internet (e.g. Carr, 2010; Shirky, 2010) and its impact on the cognitive behavior and consequences for users. Carr (2010) claims that the internet is changing our attention, as it is diminishing our capacity for prolonged attention and making our attention

spans smaller than ever. The author argues that this lack of persistent focus is a consequence of new media and skimming interaction. Shirky (2010) suggests the concept of cognitive surplus as a result of a combination of users' intellectual capacities, energy and time that are not fully engaged in one particular activity, such as watching television. The author argues that this cognitive surplus has always existed but is now used for interacting with new engaging media that enable users to produce content and collaborate with others, resulting in a more connected and innovative society. Watching traditional TV was an action where the cognitive surplus was wasted, as it meant a passive consumption of contents. The concept of cognitive surplus (Shirky, 2010) thus implies that mobile devices allow for a better use of 'dead times', either during advertising breaks, traffic moments, travelling or waiting times. A research project called Mobile Economic Times (MET) estimated that people spend daily an average of 5 hours in leisure time, including 2 hours watching television, and 80 minutes traveling. Concerning these results, the study suggests that we spend annually about 279 hours on 'dead times', but they argued that this time is being turned into useful time, being converted into 'mobile economic times'. This concept describes the trend that during these periods, people are more available and willing to browse application stores and the internet, try new products and services, give feedback and interact with brands and other people. These actions are performed in mobile technologies in processes that mix binomials of multi-screening or multi-actions (i.e. reading news on a paper in public transportation and use mobile phone). Multi-screening also promotes distributed attention between media. The notion of distributed attention was first suggested by Jenkins (2006) precisely to describe new practices related to convergence, both technological and cultural.

2.4 Which Screen is the First?

McLuhan (1994 [1964]) distinguished between hot and cool media by arguing that cool media need users' inputs and involvement. This type of media is more inclusive and stimulating and thus distinct from hot media, which are more intense and focused. We claim that current television itself, which was classified as cool by McLuhan, is becoming hotter, as new interactive devices such as smart TVs, tablets and smartphones with mobile internet are increasingly engaging and television viewing fades into the background.

McLuhan's concepts of figure and ground (McLuhan and Powers, 1986) are also useful for understanding this phenomenon. According to the author, hot media tend to be figures that focus our attention immediately, but they are too intense and users tend to be distracted by other more engaging and participatory media. Thus, hot media fade into the ground, the taken for granted environment that users' do not focus their attention on, as cool media engage attention as figures. Furthermore, new media tend to be regarded as figures while previous media fade into the background.

Applying this notion to second screening, television, previously the figure, fades into the ground as mobile devices appear as the new engaging novelty. This ground provides the context against which the figure stands out, enframes it, and gives it meaning. This process reflects the role of mobile devices both as companions, initial challengers of attention, and as enhancers, redirecting attention towards the ground that is enriched by this multi-screen experience.

3. EMPIRICAL RESEARCH

3.1 Method

Regarding empirical methods, this paper presents results that were triangulated by mixing two complementary studies: a quantitative survey and qualitative interviews. The exploratory survey was applied to a representative sample of 200 multi-screeners, dealing with users' needs, behavior and activities most performed, user profiles and drivers of adoption, among other variables. The interviews included 15 relevant stakeholders, namely from mobile manufacturing companies as Sony Ericsson, Nokia, LG; market research companies as Marktest, GFK and Netsonda; mobile marketing companies, such as TIMWE; mobile network operators, Vodafone, Optimus and MEO; and internet banking directors at Millennium BCP, BES, Banco Popular, BPI and one banking institution that want to remain anonymous.

The quantitative study was conducted based on the application of an online inquiry to a convenience sample selected. This option allowed us to get a 'snapshot' of the phenomenon we are addressing at this research project, enabling the identification of relevant issues for further exploration on the third stage with the experimental techniques. Although the convenience sample cannot be considered representative, we selected the participants according to age and media use. Thus, we focused on young adults, with ages ranging from 18 to 35, who own whether a smartphone or a tablet, as this age range registers the highest penetration rate of smartphones and tablets and also the most intense use of m-internet in Portugal (ANACOM, 2013a, 2013b, 2013c). Our survey was closed when we reached 200 valid answers.

Complementarily to this approach, the qualitative study was performed with interviews that consisted of 18 predetermined questions. The questionnaire developed for this study was based on previous studies that also analysed stakeholders' views on technology adoption (Quico, Damásio, Henriques and Veríssimo, 2010; Araújo, Cardoso and Espanha, 2008; The World Internet Project, 2012). All interviews were performed face-to-face, recorded, transcribed and analyzed by NVIVO software. The qualitative analysis was carried out in a sequential manner: all the transcribed interviews were read and each question was analyzed regarding the relevant themes approached within. After that, themes were organized and converted into a list of tree nodes.

3.2 Findings from the Survey

Our sample is constituted of 52% females and 48% males. In what concerns age, 49% of the sample in between 18 to 25 years old, 34% is between 25 and 35 years old and 12% between 36 and 45 years. All the participants live in Lisbon's metropolitan area. Concerning education, 55% have completed a college degree and 27% are pursuing further studies. Thus, 39% of the sample is constituted by students, while 52% are working and 6% are unemployed.

Regarding media use, 85% of our respondents are smartphone users while 49% have tablets. As our respondents need to have at least one of these technologies, our results show that 25% of the sample own a tablet but do not own a smartphone. As far as second screening is concerned, 79% of the respondents acknowledged using their smartphone or tablet simultaneously to television watching.

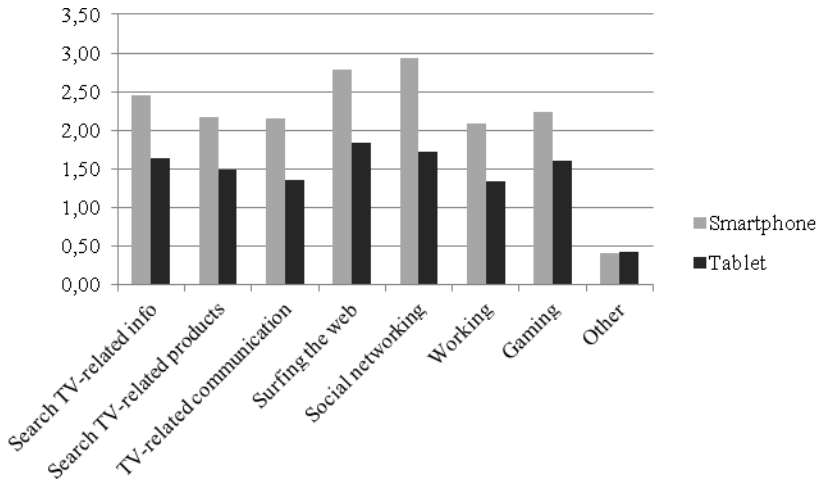

Figure 1. Most frequent activities performed on smartphones and tablets while watching television.

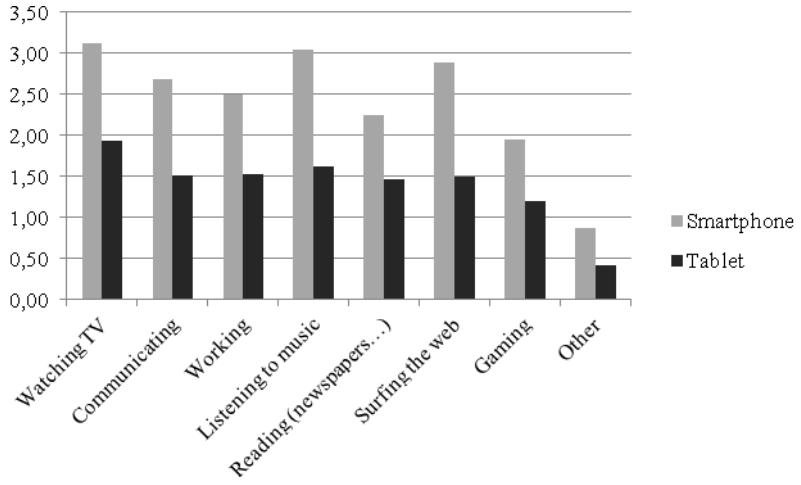

Figure 2. Most frequent activities performed while using smartphones and tablets.

Concerning the activities performed on the mobile devices while watching television, the most common was social networking, followed by internet searching with purposes not connected to what they are watching on television. For the tablet, the most common activity was internet searching with purposes connected to what they are watching on television, followed by internet searching with purposes not connected to what they are watching on television (Figure 1). When we asked which activities they usually performed while using their smartphone or tablet, the respondents first referred watching TV, followed by listening to music, although it is more frequent using the smartphone than the tablet (Figure 2).

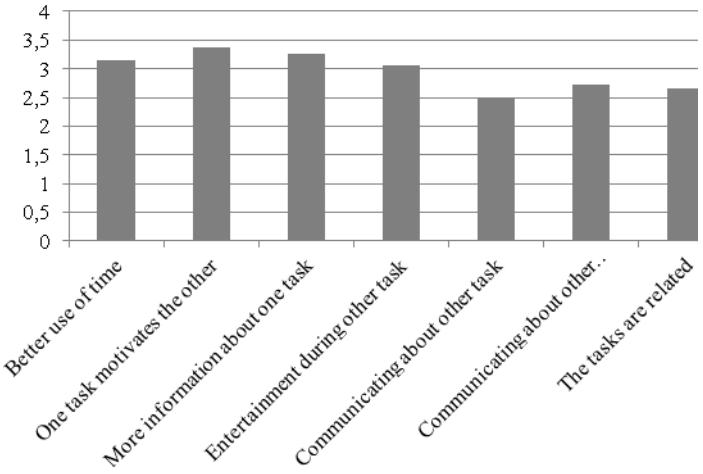

Figure 3. Reasons for multi-screening.

Regarding attention distribution, 63% of the sample agrees that the main focus of its attention is more frequently the activity they are performing on the smartphone or tablet rather than television watching.

Concerning reasons to perform different activities simultaneously in screened-devices, the strongest reason provided was that the first activity drives the second, followed by performing a second activity in order to obtain additional info about the first one (Figure 3). Also, our results show that respondents believe that nowadays television is not sufficiently exciting and that gaming, for instance, is one of the activities that most frequently fulfills that void while watching TV.

Finally, respondents express their high interest in trying new second screen services related with consumption and shopping, namely by having applications that recognize objects inside a content and allow shopping, accessing to extra content, receiving and trying product samples and accessing deals and discounts.

Results show less interest in interacting with a TV content or playing TV-related games. Only 19% of the respondents agree that they have bought products motivated for something on the first screen (TV).

In sum, the results from the survey point, contrary to the concept of second screening itself, to a preponderance of the screens of portable devices (such as smartphones and tablets) and of the activities mediated by them, which are highly personalized and affective, thus becoming the main focus of attention. Although users' have described an interchangeable role of the smartphone (or tablet), which can either be the main focus of attention or play a supporting role to another media, the activities performed via smartphone or tablet tend to be more active and social, privileging the expression of opinion and discussion with others, while the activities performed via other media, such as television, tend to be more passive and related to information gathering and content apprehension.

3.3 Findings from the Interviews

In this section we present the results from the qualitative study, based on a set of interviews with stakeholders from mobile manufacturing industry, market research companies, mobile marketing companies, mobile network operators and bank industry.

Stakeholders from mobile industry and network operators believe that the use of mobile internet is a key driver of the multi-screening phenomenon. They refer to data that sustains that mobile phones' sales are decreasing in Portugal and worldwide but smartphones are having an exponential growth due to the price being so similar to the ordinary mobile phone, which gives them a greater value for money. As consequence of this democratization, mobile internet is growing.

In what concerns usage, Vodafone believes that the use of mobile internet, both in smartphones and tablets, will soon exceed the use of internet on PCs. They refer a peak of usage at lunchtime, another between 6 p.m. and 7 p.m. and a primetime, with the higher peak, between 10 p.m. and 11 p.m., which can indicate multi-screening activities. BES also presents data that show a peak of usage of tablets that starts at 8 p.m. and reaches the highest top at 11 p.m. To this stakeholder from the banking industry, this peak means that, while watching TV, users tend to take time to use other devices to perform pending tasks, namely payments.

According to all interviewees, mobile internet users are becoming multiplatform which means that they can access it everywhere, anytime and through different devices simultaneously or in a parallel way.

Apps are one of the main attractions of the smartphones' market. They encourage mobile internet use, they create recurrence on use and ensure an optimized access, which is richer and more dynamic than in a typical mobile website. Furthermore, they easily learn to explore and take advantage of the devices' features, thus promoting richer experiences. Stakeholders from BPI and BES, highlight the fact that these devices' features allow the improvement and development of new and innovative services.

As main motivations to access mobile internet, stakeholders point to social networking. The access to social networks is very frequent along the day, as people tend to allow push notifications, but has a peak of usage at night what implicates the use of devices such as smartphones and tablets to perform second screening activities, namely sharing news and contents and see what people are talking online.

Stakeholders also point that entertainment, namely gaming and music, is a relevant feature to use mobile internet and to the performing of multi-screening activities. They believe that these actions contribute for both a better use of 'dead time' and also as entertainment when people are bored or doing something that doesn't motivate them fully. As a consequence, 'dead time' are turning into useful times.

Stakeholders considered that the convergence between internet and mobile phones has led to a range of new products and innovative services based on apps which have as main goal consumerism, relationships, geolocation and sharing.

All stakeholders agreed that the second screening concept doesn't refer only to simultaneous actions performed on screened-media but also to different activities that are happening at the same time, e.g. listening to music and playing on a smartphone, or using Instagram while having lunch with friends. Besides, they believe that second screening can also refer to actions that drive to another and are not simultaneous, as reading a book and picking up the smartphone to search for something derived by the reading. For them, this means that users' attention can be interchanging between activities or devices or can be focusing just one device/activity, depending on the task performed.

4. CONCLUSION

With this research, we expect to contribute to a deeper understanding of multi-screening activities and motivations.

Our results support the claim for reconsidering the term 'second screening'. We suggest 'multi-screening' instead, an expression that recognizes the possibility of varied screened-media binomials and that does not establish a priority of attention among them. However, our research also shows that smartphones are the most used medium for multi-screening activities, and also the most common focus of attention. A differentiation in the use of smartphones and tablets is also identified. Thus, our findings justify the need for discussion on the concept of second screening, and the viability of our argument that mobile devices are actually the first screen instead of the second. Furthermore, this exploratory study shows the relevance of conducting further research that provides a deeper understanding of the multi-screening phenomenon in order to provide insights, both for the industry and for users, that allow a better match between offer and demand in terms of platforms, applications, content and articulation.

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