

21th Century: TV series go beyond the screens

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In the last decade cultural globalization, digitalization and convergence are changing media system and the relationship with the audience. Especially teens are actively involved in the so-called participatory culture (Jenkins, 2006), which includes engagement and social connection with one another. New feedback opportunities provided by technologies represent both new chances for audience's engagement, and new challenges for TV industry, and for TV production. Today, the relationship between TV series and its audience is more intense, interactive, global and quick.

Since the classic TV genre appears to be one of the most affected by this new scenario with respect to its format, its contents, and its ways of consumption, we will look at how the TV series genre has been reshaped by new strategies, adopted by the television industry, which try to integrate offline, social and mobile activities and have transformed this classic and "closed" format in an open and hybrid one.

Internet appears to play a crucial role: indeed, TV companies use internet as a pre-air tool for new TV series (Ellis, 2007a, 2007b), the role of word of mouth seems strategic to underpin the launch, or even the re-launch, of a TV series (Calvo, 2001; Harmetz, 2000) and viral marketing techniques, which as Godin shows are based on the concept of a great idea that spreads in a target group till a self-amplifying cycle occurs (2000), are constantly used to promote this TV genre.

We previously focus on some success cases produced in America, since the American television industry appears to be the most inclined to use the Internet in order to create an engaging experience for customers and to foster the interaction with viewers by building on existing communities (Facebook, Twitter, dedicated forums,...). Then the chapter will look at the worldwide trend to deliver and exploit web television products. Our analysis will end up with the emblematic case study of Glee, an American musical comedy-drama, whose hybrid format and marketing strategies (viral marketing, flash mob events,...) has been proved to be a successful choice of Fox Italia .

New fruition of TV series

The global dynamics are mainly marked by the affirmation of a plurality of broadcasting platforms (terrestrial, cable, satellite), by new fruition (web, mobile phones...) of the audiovisual content and by a renewed range of contents offered to the audience. The dispersal of both content and audiences (fragmentation), the processes of digitalization and the advent of interactive technologies mean that content is now being produced and consumed in new ways. Consumers demand more connectivity and more customized content: as a result, choice is the buzzword for both broadcasters and audiences.

As Johnson (2010) maintains content convergence is the essential background of the new media era. A new impending wave of change is occurring and is driven by younger consumers under

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the age of 35, and especially under 25, who are more likely to watch content on alternative media devices, and more likely to prefer watching content on demand. However, consumers of all ages are joining the move towards new ways of consuming content. Sasso and Absalon (2010: 23) show that 30% of adults watch some content every week via alternative devices such as a mobile phone or personal computer. In particular, in the last decade internet has become the most relevant viewing site and site of fan engagement in the TV industry, it is the real catalyst.

A survey of 1,000 U.S. consumers showed that more and more Americans are choosing to watch TV shows on websites such as Hulu rather than on a TV. A full 83% of young consumers said they watched some, most or all of their TV programming online. This study, which was conducted by consumer electronics shopping site Retrevo (<http://www.retrevo.com/>), shows that 64% of the American audience get at least some of their TV content online; 8% of the total said they watched most of their TV shows online, and 5% said they only watched television programs on the internet. For people under 25, almost a quarter of respondents said they watched most of their TV shows online, and 6% said they only watched TV online.

Sasso and Absalon (2010) point out that the services offered by TV and the internet are converging and that Internet Protocol Television (IPTV) has emerged as a viable platform for digital television. Indeed, telecommunications operators deploy triple-play services in order to reduce customer churn levels and increase average revenues per user (ARPU).

TV viewing's shift to the web makes traditional audience data incomplete to evaluate the performance of a TV series. For instance, *Heroes* was the most downloaded TV series in 2009, despite the fact that Nielsen Ratings for the show have been decreasing year after year.

Table 1: 10 most downloaded American TV series in 2009

#	TV series	
1	"Heroes"	54,562,012
2	"Lost"	51,151,396
3	"24"	34,119,093
4	"Prison Break"	29,283,591
5	"Dr. House"	26,277,954
6	"Fringe"	21,434,755
7	"Desperate Housewives"	21,378,412
8	"Grey's Anatomy"	19,916,775
9	"Gossip Girl"	19,706,870
10	"Smallville"	19,598,999

Source: The Guardian, 2009.

That American TV watchers are moving online is also confirmed by Nielsen's last 2009 report according to which, online video consumption went up by 16% from 2008. And yet, many TV networks keep most of their episodes offline and, in an era of illegal downloads, it still takes a while for popular shows to air in a foreign market. Even pioneers in online distribution of TV series episodes, such as FOX and ABC, keep to the standard of posting only the five most recent episodes of a show's current season online on their official websites. This comes down from two main beliefs: first, as stated by Bill Bradford, senior vice president of Fox Digital, "the majority of

online viewing happens within a week after a current show airs”; secondly, as stated by Albert Cheng, executive vice president of Digital Media at Disney/ABC Television Group, “the majority of users watch shows within the first twenty-four to forty-eight hours that they become available online” (Marya, 2010). The real *online investment* made both by Fox and ABC then is not on ad-supported episodes made available on the official websites but relies on iTunes distribution: the belief that piracy comes about when consumers don’t have access to content makes the combination of ad-supported streaming on official websites and purchasable downloads on sites such as iTunes appearing as a perfect mix to fight illegal downloads in the eyes of Networks’ executives. Even if one had to believe in the accuracy and efficacy of this distribution model the issue of delays in the distribution of American TV series in foreign markets bring the problem of illegal downloads and distribution back in the front full force. The television industry seems to find it hard to adapt to the changing media landscape because structural relationships and business logics forged in previous eras prevent it from maximizing the value of increasingly fragmented television audiences.

Illegal downloads are not a western phenomenon. In China young urban audiences are avid consumers of American TV shows, mainly thanks to P2P networks. Moreover, there exists collaboration among subtitle groups across different countries. Therefore, in the Chinese context, file sharers are trying to negotiate a less-controlled communication space, albeit one with both censorship and copyright regulation (Meng, 2010).

Even if it’s a proven fact that most online TV revenues still doesn’t compare to broadcast revenues (Kaltell, 2001), it is also clear that TV Networks could still take better advantage of digital platforms and should try opening up more content. Moreover, according to a recent report from TiVo, the most popular television programs have the least-watched commercials (Mindlin, 2009), and this points out to the fact that the traditional business model for television is proving to be increasingly untenable. As stated by Barbara Williams, executive of Canwest, a media giant in Canada which decided to stream more than 50 top series on the web, the way people consume TV is changing: “We understand that our viewers aren’t always able to watch their favorite show at the designated time and our role as a broadcaster today is to offer hit TV in more places and at more times than just a traditional schedule” (Reportr.net, 2008).

There are, in fact, growing instances which demonstrated how online TV can be profitable and point to the fact that online viewers are a new audience for the networks to reach.

Internet and business models

Most TV networks broadcasts ‘conventionally’ and also tries to get and exploit the opportunities related to the distribution of episodes on the internet as well as the increasing interest towards video on demand (Küng, 2008; Sasso and Absalon, 2010). Broadband adoption and increasing connectivity speed will create challenges and opportunities for media companies: today,

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technology allows online video with high quality. In this new competitive niche there are new comers and incumbents, and both subscription and free models exist. Indeed, American major studios (Fox, NBC Universal, and Warner Bros.) have quickly moved to establish websites for their premium video titles, in hopes of grabbing a growing audience of online video viewers.

The online video market took off with the Apple's iTunes launch in 2005. Apple has since sold more than 250m TV episodes and more than 33m movies via iTunes and currently offers a catalog of more than 50,000 TV episodes and 7,500 movies, including at least 2,000 in HD. iTunes is now also available as a TV service on Apple TV (Johnson, 2010).

Downloaded movies can be either purchased or rented. An example is Netflix, offering a subscription service (\$8.99 a month) to stream movies and TV episodes over the internet and sending DVDs by mail (Sasso and Absalon, 2010). Also the Italian Mediaset Group has changed its packaging function to respond to the time and space shifting desires of viewers: video.mediaset.it is the video on demand service providing the possibility of free streaming and purchasing (pay-per-download) of films and TV productions broadcast on the Mediaset networks (Colapinto, 2010).

YouTube is the main and well-known example in the free distribution segment, but we can mention some partnerships between media manufacturers and broadcasters, such as BBC's iPlayer and Hulu. This kind of free offering is known as catch-up Television.

In Europe a disrupting market is the UK, where the online video viewing is driven by iPlayer, backed by BBC and ITV brands. Since its launch in 2006, the BBC iPlayer has evolved (adding radio, live TV channels and HD) and has been ported to work on multiple devices and platforms, including mobile phones and games consoles (Johnson, 2010). The British Commercial operator BSkyB delivers online catch-up TV service through the SkyPlayer (formerly known as 'Sky Anytime on PC' and 'Sky By Broadband'), which is also available through game console such as Xbox 360 since October 2009. This service allows Non Sky TV consumers to watch Sky TV programs without a dish or a long term contract, as well.

The already mentioned Hulu launched in March 2008 by NBC and News Corp-owned Fox. This American online, advertising-supported service offers full length TV and movie streaming. The service offers content from Warner Bros, MGM, Sony and Lionsgate. To boost revenues Hulu launched a \$9.99 per month subscription service in July 2010, adopting a mixed, hybrid business model.

The main threat to online copyrighted content is piracy, in terms of BitTorrent downloading and streaming video. The removal requests by major media content producers proved to be ineffective: the common response is to move content from major and famous sites to lesser-known video carriers. For instance, this was the strategy of Megaupload, a file hosting website, which created Megavideo now a reference point to stream pirated content (Sasso and Absalon,

2010).

Using the Business Idea conceptual model elaborated by Normann (1977), we can describe the development path of media companies in terms of recreation of the coherence between the fundamental factors that characterize the so-called business recipe: 1) clients, that is the external environment, its needs and what it is valuing 2) the offering (product) of the company and 3) internal factors such as organization structure, resources, knowledge and capabilities. Indeed, the changes in accessory and distribution aspects are in response to customers' desires and needs and they require internal changes to acquire new competences and knowledge. The market segment is the starting point from which the system is made up of the service concept, the delivery system and the image.

The sole web-product: from Dr. Horrible to Camera Café'

In the last decade the introduction of web-TV technology has changed how TV managers and producers think about television and its audience. The complete enfolding of one medium into another has altered the televisual content and the way television communicates with its audience. Beyond delivering TV series both on TV and on the web, some TV series have been created and broadcasted online bypassing the traditional gatekeepers.

The real milestone for web-product is *Dr. Horrible*. In 2007 Joss Whedon—45, known for creating cult TV shows like *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, *Angel* and *Firefly*—produced original content for the internet that actually turned a profit. Key variables were the availability of bootstrapping financing and his network, besides the contingent moment in the American TV industry and the fact Whedon is pretty famous: as a result this model is not so easy to replicate.

Because of the strike in the fall of 2007, Whedon decided to produce another idea he had been playing around using \$200,000 of his own money and calling in lots of favors: he made a Web-only show called *Dr. Horrible's Sing-Along Blog*. The three-part series tells the story of the lovelorn (and lyrical) Dr. Horrible, who wants to be accepted into the Evil League of Evil almost as much as he wants to win the heart of his crush, Penny. Concerning the financing model, Whedon kept the budget low by convincing actors like Neil Patrick Harris to work for free and later made them profit participants. Actors in smaller roles and production staff earned salaries. The series grossed \$2.5 million in two years. After a three-day free run on its own Web site (which was powered by Hulu), *Dr. Horrible* showed up exclusively on iTunes for \$4.99 (\$7.99 for high definition). Two weeks later, it went up on Hulu for free (with ads). A few months later, a DVD (complete with a musical commentary) sold on Amazon for \$14.99 (Pomerantz, 2009). Joss Whedon approached the streaming of *Dr. Horrible* as television. Making the programme available for free in those initial days, surrounded the serial with event status, much like television. You had to be in the right place and right time to be the first to see the next instalment. Even though its creator and critics treat it as a TV show (it was even awarded an Emmy in 2009 in the category short-format-action entertainment), *Doctor Horrible* is an internet creation, from the online comic book prequel to the many internet fan hommages (some of which are in the DVD). When Act I begins, we see

what seems a typical weblog entry: Billy, alone, addressing his webcam in white Dr. Horrible lab gear (Wilcox, 2009). In Whedon's experiment a program has to provide the freedom to find its audience without the threat of cancellation. Despite this idealistic view the free "televisual event" is used to generate interest in the ancillary products, (CD and DVD). Even in this experimental case the internet is primarily being treated as a marketing tool instead of a new method for distribution. Not surprisingly then, Doctor Horrible sequel will hit the big screen.

On the other part of the Globe, in China, some foreign TV series are localized and broadcast on the web and not via traditional television. A well-known example is the localized version of the famous French short-form TV program Camera Café. Camera Café is an original concept for television launched in 2001: each episode lasts about 4-5 minutes, has just one single fixed camera angle and revolves around the day to day life of a white collar company's employees who are taking their break in the coffee room. This award-winning show has already been adapted in 12 languages and more than 20 countries all over Europe (Italia1 aired the Italian version), North America, South America and Asia (The Philippines, Indonesia, and Australia). Mindshare (company of WPP Group) launched the all-digital Chinese version of Camera Café with Nescafé as sponsor on youku.com (<http://cameracafe.youku.com>), beginning January 25th, 2010 for an ambitious four month season (60 original episodes for season one).

An interesting sponsored multiplatform drama is a production of Huaso (a joint venture between Sony Pictures TV International and China Film Group): Sony's branded "Sofia's Diary" had been localized for China's market as "Sufie's Diary," with altered storylines and products. The 3-minute episodes are aired through major Chinese video and social media portals (Sina, Cernet, and Youku), and also in airports, public buses and subway stations in Beijing and Shanghai. Targeting teenagers and college students, each episode proposes a problem and viewers have the power to make decisions for Sufei while she adjusts to her new life in Shanghai. Indeed, the plot line is solely driven by netizens through weekly online polls or mobile voting. The degree of interactivity is very high, and visitors can interact with the main characters through online comments and blogs on dedicated websites. Over 15.3 million online interactions were recorded (Leung, 2009).

Especially digital natives are oriented to watch TV-like content on the web, as they can control the what, where and when. This new kind of products represents a new channel of communication and advertising for brands. Sponsored content is a strategic tool to engage with potential customers due to the increasing negative attitudes towards ads.

The Glee case: a TV program outside the TV screen

Glee is an American musical comedy-drama television series (aired on Fox) which focuses on a high school show choir, the "New Directions!". Glee looks like a niche show, with its Broadway renditions and obscure pop-culture reference, but costs 25% more than most prime time dramas. Glee is the perfect example of the new diversified nature of online presence. It's not simply about a website anymore: Glee diverse ways of using social networking sites are an important part of its production narrative, and even if no new stories or background info are opened up in these venues, they do illuminate how the TV network wants us to see the characters. The online and

collateral material related to the show expands the text beyond the rigid constraints of broadcast.

Since the beginning Ryan Murphy—the creator— and Fox want and need the show to push the boundaries of network television. As for the structure of the TV series it could be said that *Glee* is a YouTube-friendly show: each episode of *Glee* contains at least 4 to 5 “mini-shows” that can be sliced and packaged to be the perfect “YouTube” length. For instance, the Musical performances all lasting for 2 to 5 minutes; moreover in *Glee* there are sections clearly intended to go viral such as “All the Single Ladies” Kurt rendition and football clip (Episode 4) which earned both more than 4 million hit on YouTube Fox official channel only in the first week.

In an attempt to fight illegal downloads of collateral products from the TV series, Fox started mimicking typical fan practices, releasing online as much contents and previews as usually provided by fan sites and YouTube channels.

Creators of *Glee* seem to have well understood that the modern experience of television does not begin and end with the practice of watching television programs, but instead encompasses a viewer’s consumption of, or interaction with a wide range of program-related content and activities.

With special regard to *Glee*, since the beginning fans posted their own live or lip-synched video renditions of the show’s repertory on MySpace and YouTube. This was a type of “redoing” that is both participatory but respects the original creation. The ubiquity of technology, webcams paired with online video, makes the production of these videos extremely simple. Fox has encouraged the online tributes by touting *Glee* sheet music and sponsoring contests that reward the best amateur MySpace karaoke singers with prizes like a lesson from the *Glee* vocal coach. Fans are participating within the construct of the *Glee* narrative by recording renditions of these songs. Fox incorporated these videos in its marketing strategy.

Through a massive use of social networking and pushing online activities connected with the “musical side” of *Glee*, the show is tapping into the cultural phenomenon that anybody can be a star overnight on MySpace or YouTube. Popularity is indeed a crucial concept to the show, since all the storyline is organized around the opposition between traditional popularity and the new kind of popularity provided by social media and web 2.0 tools.

It was indeed thorough an aggressive marketing campaign relying mostly on social media, that Fox has successfully imposed a new defining word for all the under-average people struggling in the high school years to be accepted: “gleeks”, a portmanteau of “glee” and “geek”. The association of the word Gleek with a hand gesture typically used to refer to losers and now proudly used to auto-define as a glee fan, completed the new framework built by Fox promotion and marketing for the show. One example of this production narrative was the launch of the “Biggest Gleek” mini-competition. The idea was simple: you could earn points by mentioning *Glee* on your status messages or tweets, inviting friends to join the competition. This competition was channelling and rewarding fan enthusiasm.

Glee: the launch campaign

The virtual aspect is especially evident when talking about the Fox's marketing campaign for the show, which began with a post-American Idol airing of the pilot and led to a five-month, buzz-generating viral marketing campaign that took full advantage of the popularity of social networking sites like Twitter and Facebook. For the first time a network is using a pilot for a show not as the beginning of a series, but as the start of a marketing campaign.

One point that appears to be clear, in the way the campaign was organized and developed, was the fact that Web communities are capable of generating strong support for niche products but they still can't compete with the mass market success generated from broadcast media. That's why Fox sold *Glee* balancing its online promotions with more traditional events.

In April 2009 Fox begins introducing outdoor ads and weekly magazine print ads touting the pilot, along with spots on its own air. There were screenings of the Pilot in the top 10 media markets, including one at a Santa Monica high school, which is attended by the "Glee" cast. Fox used also its May 18 upfront presentation in New York to help drive tune-in for the pilot as well, introducing special live performances from the entire cast.

Glee Pilot is then shown on May 19th 2009 right after American Idol Finale. Fox won't air the second episode of the series until September 9th 2009. In the word of Joe Earley, VP Marketing Fox, "the goal was just to get as many people as possible to see it (before the fall). There was no better platform for us than to put it on behind American Idol" (Adallan, 2009). Fox seems to know there will be many groups of potential viewers who would never respond to traditional marketing for a show such as "Glee". That's why it's key to give viewers as many chances as possible to see the pilot. Fox pumped the *Glee* Pilot out through every available online channel. The Pilot was free and ubiquitous.

The first episode was the number one downloaded television show on iTunes with Fox offering the show for free (Adallan, 2009). But the long break after the pilot episode and the musical format could work against "Glee". The show's creator and promoters used the down time to really gain traction online by engaging with their most passionate fans. As stated by Jason Clark, Fox spokesman: "We did anything to bring them back into show, like Facebook pages and character Tweets, we gave every possible way for fans to connect with *Glee* and Fox." (Grover, 2009) The leading concept of the marketing campaign was to turn people who watched the show into brand ambassadors. For this reason, and according to the mixed methods of promotion explained earlier, during the summer hiatus: the show was screened at summer camps; trailers were shown in front of the latest "Harry Potter" film; "Glee" advertising was on major summer concert tours; *Glee* stars engaged in a 10-city tour; and street teams promoted the show at recreational venues during major holiday weekends. During the same summer hiatus Fox has also partnered with Photobucket.com for a national promotion encouraging viewers to show off their "gold-star potential" by submitting photos and videos of themselves.

During the fall hiatus Fox has launched a national open casting campaign for new characters

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to appear on the series through social networking website MySpace. A synergistic masterstroke since both Fox and MySpace are part of the same media conglomerate, News Corporation. Would-be Gleeks—the name fans gave themselves—between the ages of 16 and 26 could submit their audition video either by uploading their own pre-recorded video or choosing from a selection of MySpace Karaoke Glee hits on the Glee Auditions Official MySpace Profile.

In occasion of the re-air of the pilot (9 Sept 2009), FOX teams up with Twitter, the social networking and microblogging service. Because of the holiday weekend, when ratings usually drop off, the network wanted to “reward” fans by adding value to the repeat. The re-air of the Pilot is accompanied by live Twitter updates from the cast and producers, answering fan questions as well as providing commentary and behind-the-scenes details. In a week when most prime time shows are debuting with the hopes of attracting an audience, “Glee” seems to have already found its niche. On the ratings front, the episode pulled in 7.3 million viewers and was tops in the 18-49 demographics.

It’s easy to see how social-media activity could eventually be used to prove consumers’ engagement with a show, and thus make it more valuable to advertisers. Twitter stream may not be suitable for all genres and programs, and certainly isn’t appropriate for first-run episodes. While Fox found that people watching the third showing of “Glee” enjoyed the Twitter feed immensely, viewers of the “Fringe” repeat were not as enthusiastic (fig. 1).

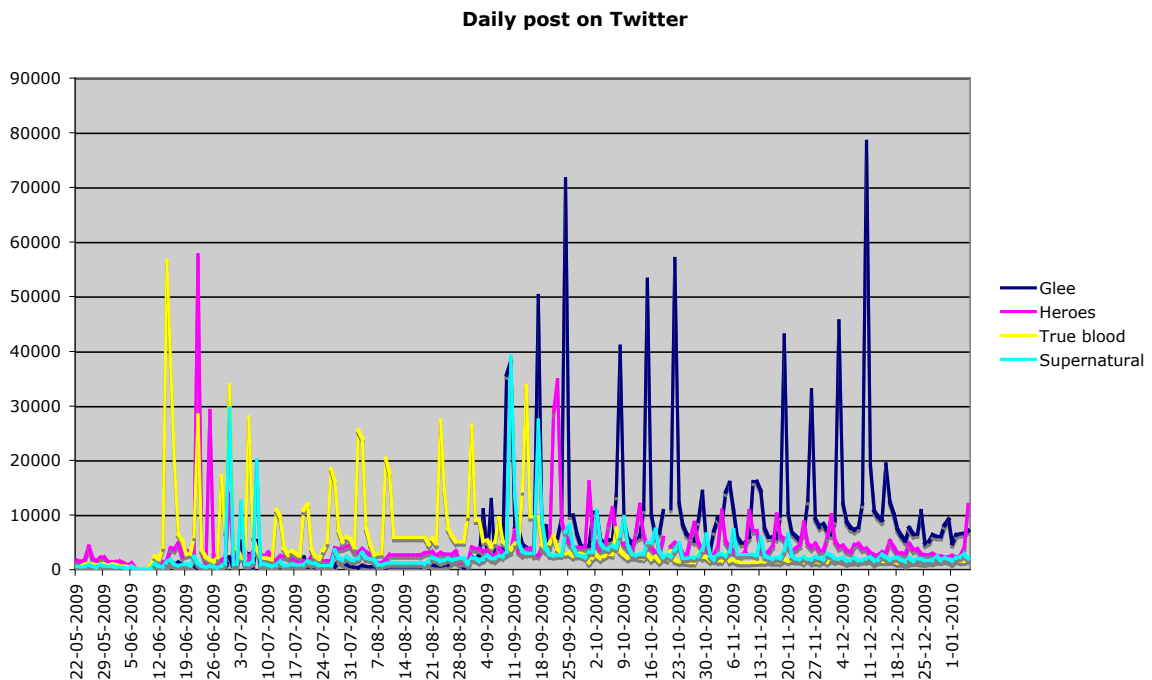


Figure 1: Twitter, Fringe vs Glee

We’ve pointed out how Fox worked with social networks deepening engagements with characters from the show over the summer, but also blurring the line between reality and fiction.

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For example, the “sensitive jock” Finn has not a Twitter account, but the actor Cory Monteith does. During summer 2009, more than 10,000 followers read about the summer’s “Glee” tour through his regular updates. Additionally, a Glee fan, Manny Garcia, posted a self-made mashup of Cyndi Lauper’s ‘True Colors’ and the ‘Wicked’ tune ‘Defying Gravity’ to YouTube. Garcia introduces his performance by noting his love for ‘Glee’. Monteith tweeted a link to Garcia’s video and accompanied it with a simple one-word vote of confidence: ‘Props!’ Monteith’s nearly 75,000 followers responded by flooding Garcia’s YouTube page with positive comments and by retweeting Monteith’s message all over Twitter. Moreover, the group “We Want Manny Garcia On GLEE!” was opened on Facebook. Glee inspired a new viral video star. Giving the online audience a regular supply of new rawhides to chew on, Ryan Murphy and Fox were able to earn their loyalty and turn them from casual or even devoted fans into surrogate marketing agents. The bloggers who write about TV series in general or this one in particular were the ones selling the TV series, broadcasting the new material that was given to them all over the Internet.

Glee to mobile

As we’ve reported, Fox tried to spread the Glee way over the television screen and the PC screen too. Since Glee has a huge teen and 18-34 demographics, Fox use mobile platform to promote this comedy Glee during the fall hiatus. Fans can call through the free service SayNow and listen to messages from the stars of the show, leave messages for the actors to hear, listen to voice messages from other fans and maybe get a call back from one of the actors. Consumers can opt-in to receive text alerts when new messages are available. In the first 3 weeks more than 5,000 fans have listened to the messages from Glee cast members and more than 4,000 have been unique callers. When consumers call the Glee SayNow number they are presented with a promotional message urging them to continue watching the television program.

Fox also developed in partnership with Smule (a developer of interactive sonic applications) an application for iPad and iPhone named “Glee” (see <http://glee.smule.com/>). The application lets you sing along karaoke-style to original performances from the TV series, whose lyrics displayed on-screen as the app records you. Smule auto-corrects the pitch and automatically adds multipart harmonies. Users can share recordings with friends (via Facebook, Twitter, or e-mail), or collaborate with friends and strangers alike. This became one of the most downloaded applications for i-phone and simultaneously contributed to greatly expand the TV series text. Moreover, since the show is tapping into the cultural phenomenon that anybody can be a star overnight on MySpace or YouTube, the development of this application was the natural consequence of a previous strategy elaborated by Fox for increasing fan participation in the construction of the collateral universe of the TV series. Since the beginning fans post their own live or lip-synched video renditions of the show’s repertory on MySpace and YouTube.

Glee beyond the screens

Content can be delivered as an augmented product (Kotler, 2004) through different platforms (television channels and internet) and generate a merchandising business, as well: books,

DVD, or gadgets. Indeed, the main characteristic of Glee business model is to exploit collateral products. Brand extension has revealed to be the key element to reach profitability even before the traditional five year span. The series incorporates music: Fox and Sony/Columbia Records share in the revenue and the Studio puts the money back into the cost of producing the show.

If traditionally TV networks, such as CW, use new songs in its shows, and often drive viewers online to buy music and in exchange TV network often get a reduced fee for use of the songs, Glee takes it to the next level. Thanks to the use of multiple songs in each Glee episode, producers and Columbia Records are able to release those tunes strategically to goose interest in each episode and to keep fans interested in the days between airings of new programs. In 2009, the Glee cast had 25 singles chart on the Billboard Hot 100, the most by any artist since The Beatles had 31 songs in the chart in 1964. In total, Glee has placed 95 songs on the Hot 100 weekly chart, second only to the 108 entries of Elvis Presley, though fewer than half have charted for more than one week (Trust, 2009, 2010). Up to now Columbia has released 4 music albums collecting songs from Glee and 2 special albums specifically produced for the music market.

Besides all that a line of Glee-related merchandise, some official Glee-related books, developed in collaboration with the show's producers and writers, have been released. Little, Brown Books for Young Readers and Twentieth Century Fox struck the deal to publish this series of official Glee-related books. The first novel is called "Glee: The Beginning". In the perspective of our analysis is interesting to highlight the trans-medial autobiography of Sue Sylvester, the head coach of the cheerleading squad "Cheerios", the glee club's "arch-nemesis".

Going one step further was the launching of a national open casting campaign for new characters to appear on the series through MySpace. A synergistic masterstroke since both Fox and MySpace are part of the same media conglomerate, News Corporation. Would-be Gleeks between the ages of 16 and 26 can submit their audition video either by uploading their own pre-recorded video or choosing from a selection of MySpace Karaoke *Glee* hits on the Glee Auditions Official MySpace Profile. In this case the TV series is not only going beyond the screen but it is incorporating inside itself what's outside the screen. The line between who's watching and who's been watched is getting thinner and thinner.

Conclusions and discussion

In the last decade television executives has understood that in marketing activities authentic enthusiasm would be more effective and they sustain superfans to hype things they adored. These fans are already proactively searching for information about the TV show they loved; therefore TV producers can exploit this behaviour.

These new forms of audience participation are seen as valuable to advertisers and media companies, renegotiating the social contract between media producers and consumers in a way which may be seen as legitimate and mutually rewarding to all involved (Austin *et al.*, 2006). This shift should be explained by the specific motives and different judgments about value of consumers. Consumers act in the so-called gift economy, in opposition to the commodity culture

of companies. They operate in a social order which centers on the giving and accepting of gifts and they place less emphasis on economic motives. Brand (1995) evoked the idea of a gift economy to explain how companies create valued relations to their customers within this new cultural context: for any company to succeed online they need to join the gift economy that defines online relations and it means often giving away content.

This new approach adopted by media companies could be seen as necessary according to the Business Idea conceptual model elaborated by Normann (1977). To be successful media companies need coherence between the fundamental factors—the Clients System, the Product System and the Company Organizational System—, consequently, the changes in accessory and distribution aspects are in response on one side to customers' desires and needs, on the other to the development of new technologies and the dispersal, fragmentation of content.

The case of Glee enlightens how Fox has profited from the existence of fan practices and multiple distribution platforms. On one side, Fox pushed audience engagement with the core program through multiple platforms, devices and business models, through repackaged/reorganized program content and through additional content developed to extend television text. On the other side, Fox encouraged practices of acquisition and ownership by the viewer such as production of show-related objects, participation in themed, experiential, productive, and challenge-oriented activities. In this sense we can say that Glee was true to the first statement of his own creator, Ryan Murphy: "I think they are all wanting to **break out of the box**: What is network television? What can it be? Every once in a while, something comes along that's just different. Sometimes it works, sometimes it doesn't. But it's great to attempt it" (Adallan, 2009).

Indeed Glee represents a new and emerging revenue model for broadcasting television based on the engagement with the core program content through the program's narrative construction, through multiple platforms, devices and business models, through repackaged/reorganized program content and through additional content developed to extend television text. On a second note, Glee was built in order to push natural practices of acquisition and ownership by the viewer which can develop in the production of show-related objects, the participation in themed, experiential, productive, and challenge-oriented activities, the use of the television text as the basis or pretence for interaction with other viewers, the show's creative professionals, or the narrative characters and the direct interaction between the viewer-participant and the television program.

The case of Glee then is enlightening firstly because it demonstrates that consumers around the world are, in fact, excited to share common experiences and secondly because it suggests that blockbuster success could be set up via long tail actions, or previous events over time.

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