

The Effects of Hispanics' Social TV Participation on Ethnic Identifications

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Abstract

Social television encompasses the social media aspect of television viewing. This study attempts to investigate how social television influences Hispanic and national ethnic identification as well as social presence. Based on the theoretical framework of Tajfel and Turner's Social Identity Theory (SIT), this study focuses on the potential influence of social television on Hispanics' ethnic identifications and social presence. With a sample of 100 Hispanic students, we conducted a lab experiment to measure the effects of exposure to ethnic and non-ethnic related Twitter feeds on Hispanic and national ethnic identification along with social presence. Findings reveal that there was no significant difference between those exposed to the ethnic-identity related Twitter feed compared to those exposed to the non-ethnic identity related Twitter feed, followed by the control group not exposed to the Twitter feed at all. Implications were discussed.

Keywords: *Social television; Social presence; Hispanic identification; National identification, Social networking sites*

1. INTRODUCTION

Social television is reflective of a growing fundamental aspect of the viewing experience. Second-screening through social media has had a dramatic increase in the last few years alone. In fact, 47% of respondents to a global Nielsen survey stated they engage with social media while watching video programming [1]. Social media have an effect on television viewing, with the success of the program actually being influenced by the activity on social networking sites (SNSs) [2]. In this sense, the engagement in social television results in the viewing of the program itself. Furthermore, previous research has demonstrated that social television furthers the "social" aspects of television viewing [3,4]. This follows research by Nielsen showing that over half of global respondents like to keep up and watch shows so that they can join the conversation on social media [1]. Also, almost half of these respondents say they are more likely to watch live programming if there is a tie-in to social media.

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The largest engagement levels with social media in the U.S. arise from competition reality shows, especially during live results [5]. Here, the program format stimulates social television engagement because it not only provides a place to view public opinion, it allows the viewer to discuss live results with people throughout the country [6]. In fact, the key motivation for audience engagement in competition reality shows on SNSs may reveal the importance of social media use; that is, the need or desire to be part of a larger group [4]. The format of the competition reality show alone asks for engagement from viewers. Whether it asks for support through voting online, or gathers opinions from those watching live, competition reality shows feed into the desire to be part of the larger conversation. Particularly, on the phenomenon of a reality competition show, SNSs is a technology that is both for fandom, with users following celebrities, and ‘audiencing’. Audiencing is what users tend to associate with SNSs when they log in to join a conversation about a desired media event [3]. Second screening via SNSs during reality television programs connect the viewer at home to the audience online, allowing the television viewing experience to be a much more communal one, fostering the social motives.

The impact of Hispanics on U.S. growth is visible and reflects the emerging influence of Hispanics on media usage. The Hispanic television viewing experience can be exclusive in that Spanish-language programming is readily available with its own category within U.S. broadcasting, as compared to other minority ethnic groups whose programming may only be on cable or premium television. By taking into consideration the experience of Hispanics in social television as one of the many minority ethnic groups in the United States, the purpose of the study is to examine how engagement in social television impacts Hispanic viewers’ perception of self-identity in terms of Hispanic and national ethnic identification. Ethnic identification is often held as an affiliative construct where an individual is viewed by themselves and by others as belonging to a particular ethnic or cultural group [7]. Hispanic ethnic identification refers to the general level of identification one may have as a member of the Hispanic ethnic group. National ethnic identification relates to the particular group one may identify with, within the Hispanic ethnic minority group. For example, a Mexican can identify with the general term of Hispanic, but may also identify with the specific nationality of Mexican.

Because this study focuses on social television during a competition reality program, it is important to be able to measure how someone perceives being present and in the moment with the rest of the audience, given the nature of the program to facilitate the social connection between viewers [8,9]. Following Gunawardena’s definition, social presence is “the degree to which a person is perceived as a ‘real person’ in mediated communication” (p. 365) [10]. Thus, the potential effects of social television on the viewer’s perception of self-identity in relation to their ethnicity and nationality may differ depending on the degree of realness of interactions and relationships created through social media, since this is what social television is based on.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. Social Television Participation

The social television phenomenon has gained much attention in recent years, since there is now a multitude of technological screens from which viewers can not only watch but participate in social interactions online. Because of this it is becoming ever so common for television viewers to actually be engaged with other forms of media at the same time and television aids social functions online [11, 12]. In fact, Twitter engagement alone shows remarkable social television statistics, according to Naghi and Midha, “85 percent of primetime-active Twitter users reported habitually Tweeting about television” and of this number, “72 percent Tweeted

about television shows while watching live, 60 percent when actually not watching, and 58 percent while watching on other platforms including on-demand” (p. 451) [12].

Previous research suggests that it is the social aspect of social television that influences audience engagement in social television. Indeed, SNS users' need to belong is found to be a predictor of viewers' engagement in social media coviewing [13]. Baumeister and Leary explain the fundamental human need to belong as humans' persistent drive to create and maintain meaningful relationships [14]. Social media allow for a sense of co-personal viewing that extends the physical elements of traditional coviewing [15]. The phenomenon of social television further discussed explicates how need to belong can actually drive audience engagement.

Research shows that a main motivation for television viewing by Hispanics is their unique ethnic identification and language. Level of ethnic identity does, in fact, motivate Hispanics in both selecting and avoiding television. Overall, their findings demonstrate “that social identity is an important consideration when individuals make choices about if, and how, they are going to engage with television” (p. 251) [16]. In addition to this, it is found that language does matter when it comes to Hispanic viewers. Rather than English ability, the language spoken at home is a better indicator of television viewing [17]. Overall, those who speak Spanish in the home will view more television in Spanish, those who speak both languages equally will watch both, and those who speak mostly English in the home will rarely watch Spanish television at all. This gives Hispanics the unique opportunity to engage in television viewing in either language, but most likely preferring and viewing Spanish-language television. In this case, it is expected that a Spanish-language competition reality program would yield the most motivation for social television engagement on the part of Hispanic viewers.

2.2. Social Identity Theory

Ethnic group membership is an important aspect of social identity, especially when engaging with media. The desire to positively identify with a specific ethnic group is elaborated on through Social Identity Theory (SIT). SIT, originally developed by Tajfel and Turner, explains group membership and expected intergroup behavior [18, 19]. People can maintain their self-esteem by valuing those groups which they are members of, known as in-groups, and by devaluing groups to which they do not belong, known as out-groups [20]. Essentially, people are motivated to maintain a positive social identity resulting from the status of one's in-group.

It is important to note that the basis of this theory is on the accepted issue that “all individuals are motivated to maintain a positive self-image” (p. 1525) [20]. Here, the membership to the group is important to the self-concept, whether it is race, sex, etc. To maintain a positive self-esteem, people must evaluate themselves in a favorable manner. This self-esteem is influenced by the different sets of identities an individual can have. In fact, people can be classified by their personal and/or social identities [19]. Personal identity is related to the personal self and individual behaviors, while social identity is related to intergroup behaviors and a collective self.

Along with the self-esteem hypothesis, SIT presents another basic motivation through uncertainty reduction theory. People attempt to reduce feelings of uncertainty about their surrounding environment and where they are within it. A social identity allows individuals to reduce uncertainty about who they are and how they should behave. The social identity then, is “particularly effective if the social identity is clearly defined by membership in a distinctive high entitativity group” (p. 903) [19]. Thus, the more one is uncertain about the self, the more one strives to belong to a higher entitativity group, distinct and clearly defined.

Once people identify with a group, they actually begin to display favoritism toward that in-group. This is seeking “positive distinctiveness by evaluating their group more favorably than the outgroup on some valued dimension” (p. 1526) [20]. A social identity is psychologically salient to manage attitudes, feelings, perceptions, and even behavior. People can draw on these social identities if they are chronically accessible in memory or situationally accessible [19]. It makes sense then, that exposure to members of the in-group will allow an individual to seek positive distinctiveness by evaluating their group more favorably. The social identity in such a situation is obvious and even more self-evident to the individual.

Therefore, the high viewing of Spanish-language television by Hispanics may reflect the ability of Spanish-language programming to allow Hispanic individuals to positively solidify their ethnic identity on account of exposure to their respective ethnic groups. Here, Hispanics are able to simultaneously fill the need to belong to a social group while maintaining distinctiveness from another ethnic group. Hispanics are motivated to identify with those social groups to which they feel a sense of kinship. At the same time, they separate from those groups from which they feel they do not belong through an explicit expression of distinctiveness from that group [21]. Overall, both Spanish-language reality program and social media act as a forum for the strengthening of a positive social identity.

2.3. Self-Categorization Theory

In order to further explain the process of categorization involved in SIT, self-categorization theory explains “how and when people define themselves as individual and group entities” and examines “the impact of this variability in self-perception (‘I’ to ‘we’) for understandings of mind and behavior” (p. 399) [22]. This theory specifically looks at the categorization process, furthering the social identity model with an emphasis on level of in-group association. Thus, a greater level of association with the in-group will actually result in more stressing of differences [23]. The original statement of self-categorization theory specifically focused on levels of inclusiveness and on depersonalized self-perception [24].

This theory also gives great importance to salience that is used to determine how situations are given meaning to influence both self-perception and behavior. For example, social comparative features that define one’s social identity in a given context can be applied to understand one’s self-definition as an individual” (p. 415) [22]. The nature of individuality is then ascertained through the act of categorization and social comparison. The social comparative context can alter one’s sense of self as an individual or as a group. Following these theories, Hispanics’ exposure to Twitter feeds relating to Hispanic ethnic identification during their television watching should lead to greater effects on Hispanic identification than non-ethnic identity related feeds because it presents a social interaction where the ethnic group is identified. Hispanics are motivated to identify with the audience because it is of the in-group Hispanic ethnicity. The individual ethnic identification of self in conjunction with the reinforcement of a group social identity provides the basis for the following hypothesis:

H1a: Hispanics exposed to ethnic identity related tweets during their reality program watching will have higher levels of Hispanic ethnic identification compared to those exposed to non-ethnic identity related tweets, followed by those not exposed to a Twitter feed.

One aspect of this study aims to show how Hispanic viewers may be more likely to identify themselves as a specific national group rather than part of the larger Hispanic/Latino ethnic group. Although much research has been done on Hispanics’ identification of self as Hispanic, the same cannot be said for specific national

ethnic identification. Research shows that, overall, Hispanics in the U.S. prefer to identify as a specific national category. Taylor, Lopez, Martínez, and Velasco explain the following: “When it comes to describing their identity, most Hispanics prefer their family’s country of origin over pan-ethnic terms” (p.1) [25]. So, rather than simply being a point of nationalistic pride, the description of self as Mexican or Cuban serves in the form of individual identity. Exposure to fellow Hispanics through social television behaviors may lead to a Hispanic categorizing the self as Mexican, a sort of individual, personal identity. Thus, this presents the basis for the following hypothesis.

H1b: Hispanics exposed to ethnic identity related tweets during their reality program watching will have higher levels of national ethnic identification compared to those exposed to non-ethnic identity related tweets, followed by those not exposed to a Twitter feed.

2.4. Social Presence

This study looks at the effects that exposure to SNSs may have on Hispanic audiences’ ethnic and nationality identification. It is important, then, that the Hispanic audiences feel present in their engagement with the SNS medium. This is the essence of social television and may explicate why the usage of SNSs may engender feelings of identification among the Hispanic population.

Social presence theory is defined as “the degree of salience of the other person in the interaction and the consequent salience of the interpersonal relationships (p. 65)[26].” Essentially, the social effects of a medium are primarily caused by the degree of social presence it allows its users. This social presence is the user’s sense of awareness of the mediation between the interactions of another person.

Social presence may explain why reality program watching related to ethnicity may have an effect on ethnic and nationality identification compared to program watching not related to ethnic-identity. This leads to the following hypothesis:

H2: Hispanics exposed to ethnic identity related tweets during their reality program watching will have a higher level of social presence than those exposed to non-ethnic identity related tweets.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Sample and Procedure

The participants of the research were recruited voluntarily through an email listserv aimed towards Hispanic students and members of a campus Hispanic student organization at a large Southeastern University in the U.S. In addition, undergraduate and graduate students were recruited through classes which offered extra credit as an incentive. Only participants who identified themselves as Hispanic were qualified to take part in this study. One hundred and five students participated in the experiment, and five participants were eliminated from the data set for not fully following protocol during the lab experiment. The final sample size was $n = 100$ ($M = 20.7$). This sample includes students from 18 to 30 years of age with the average age being 20.7. The largest groups of national ethnicities were Cuban ($n = 24$), Colombian ($n = 15$), Venezuelan ($n = 12$), and Puerto Rican ($n = 11$).

Prior to arriving at the lab, the participants were asked to complete a preliminary survey indicating self-identification of Hispanic and national ethnic identity (Mexican, Puerto Rican, etc.). Once at the lab, the

participants were randomly assigned to one of the three conditions: exposure to ethnicity-related tweets vs. exposure to ethnicity-unrelated tweets vs. television viewing only. The participants were then instructed to watch a reality competition show, *La Voz Kids*, that lasted a total of 35 minutes in the on-campus laboratory, followed by a 5-minute commercial break. For those in two experimental conditions (exposed to ethnicity-related and ethnicity-unrelated tweets), participants were asked to scroll through the assigned Twitter feed on their smartphones. The participants were reminded to only use their phone during this designated time and only for this purpose. Once the show was over, the participants completed a post-test questionnaire using the scales measuring Hispanic ethnic and national identity and social presence. The questionnaire was given at the research lab and filled out by the participants immediately after exposure to one of the previous conditions.

3.2. Experimental Conditions

In order to test the hypotheses, a lab experiment was conducted where participants were randomly exposed to one of the following three experimental conditions: exposure to ethnicity-related tweets vs. exposure to ethnicity-unrelated tweets vs. television viewing only (as the control condition). In the ethnicity-related tweet condition ($n = 36$), this condition asked participants to scroll through a pre-created Twitter feed during a 5-minute commercial break within the show. This pre-created Twitter feed included both positive and negative tweets regarding the contestants of the show and their ethnicity (screenshots presented in Appendix). Thus, it is labelled related, since the topic and theme of the Twitter feed involves ethnicity (Hispanic and national). The ethnicity-unrelated condition ($n = 33$) also asked participants to scroll through a pre-created Twitter feed during commercial breaks during a 5-minute commercial break within the show. This condition was labelled as “unrelated” because the social media feed did not discuss the ethnicity of the contestants on the show. The television-only condition ($n = 31$) involved exposure to the 35-minute reality competition show, *La Voz Kids*, only, and did not require participants to scroll through any Twitter feed. This served as the control for the study since it does not reflect the use of a second screen discussing Hispanic ethnic identification.

3.3. Stimuli

3.3.1. Competition Reality Show

This study utilized a newly created “show” based on actual auditions on the existing show, *La Voz Kids*. Essentially, a compilation of prior auditions of the show was created to fit the time limit necessary for the stimulus. The criteria for the clips chosen were to include participants of the top 10 Hispanic ethnicities in the U.S. The ethnicities included in the show compiled were: Colombian, Mexican, Cuban, Dominican, and Puerto Rican [27].

In addition, a 5-minute commercial break was inserted within the show to separate two blocks of auditions. These commercials were chosen with awareness for lack of ethnic discussion. This means that the commercials did not explicitly discuss ethnicity but rather everyday products. These commercials included both English and Spanish commercials that were currently playing at the time. The products advertised ranged from soda products to new cellular technologies in order to more closely imitate a real-life show. This show was compiled, edited, and downloaded at 1080p in order to have the highest quality video presented to the participants in the laboratory. The video was directly downloaded and played in order to verify that there were no lagging issues and that the quality maintained for all participants. The same video was played for all participants.

3.3.2. Twitter Feed

Participants were randomly assigned to one of three conditions, two that included a Twitter feed and the other being the control with no Twitter feed. The participants were asked during volunteer sign-up for participation, to bring their own smart phones if they owned one. Prior to watching the show, participants were asked to search one of the following hashtags: #lvzk16 or #lvzk17. Participants were asked if they had the Twitter app, and if so, they could search the feed this way. If not, they were asked to open twitter.com on their phone browser and search the hashtag to access the feed this way. This allowed the participants to scroll through the Twitter feed on their own phones. This was done in order to more closely assimilate at-home second-screening.

The feeds themselves consisted of real-life posts, all maintained together by the hashtag. Each feed included about 75 tweets from various different accounts. The #lvzk16 Twitter feed discussed the ethnicity of the participants of the show, while the #lvzk17 Twitter feed discussed the show overall without mention of the ethnicity of the participants on the show. Twitter feeds are shown in Appendix.

3.4. Measures

3.4.1. Hispanic and National Ethnic Identification

The ethnic and national identity questionnaire is based on the Ethnic Identity Scale (EIS) [28]. This measure was designed to measure the multifaceted nature of ethnic identity, and was found to be reliable and valid [28]. The measure is comprised of 9 items for ethnic identification and 10 items for national identification, respectively, and the responses range from “does not describe me at all (1)” to “describes me very well (5)” (Hispanic ethnic identification $\alpha = .70$; national ethnic identification $\alpha = .81$).

3.4.2. Social Presence

The social presence questionnaire is based on two social presence measure instruments. The first is the Social Presence Scale (SPRES) and the second is a self-reporting Social Presence Scale [29, 30] (2011). The combination of these scales, which consisted of 16 items, were edited to reflect the use of specific technology used (i.e., Twitter feed). The scale was measured on a 5 point Likert scale with responses varying from “not at all (1)” to “a great deal (5)” ($\alpha = .92$).

4. RESULTS

To examine whether exposure to Twitter feed during reality competition show have significant effects on Hispanic ethnic identification and nationality identification as well social presence, analyses of covariance (ANCOVAs) were used to test the effect of the independent variables (unrelated/related Twitter feed and no feed [control]) with the covariate variables (pre-Hispanic and pre-National ethnic identification, on dependent variables. In addition, independent samples t-tests were used to analyze the statistical differences between the means of the two groups, ethnic related tweets and non-ethnic related tweets, regarding social presence.

H1a hypothesized that participants exposed to ethnic identity related tweets will have higher levels of Hispanic ethnic identification compared to those exposed to non-ethnic identity related tweets, followed by those not exposed to a Twitter feed. According to the results, there was no significant effect of ethnic identity

related tweets on Hispanic ethnic identification after controlling for the effect of pre-Hispanic ethnic identification, $F(3,99) = .06, p = .94$. The result shows that after exposure to an ethnic related Twitter feed during the reality competition show, *La Voz Kids*, there was no significant difference between the three groups compared to those exposed to the non-ethnic identity related Twitter feed, followed by the control group not exposed to the Twitter feed at all.

H1b hypothesized that participants exposed to ethnic identity related tweets will have higher levels of national ethnic identification compared to those exposed to non-ethnic identity related tweets, followed by those not exposed to a Twitter feed. This also had no significant effects. The result shows that there was no significant difference in national ethnic identification between those exposed to ethnic identity related Twitter feed and the non-ethnic identity related Twitter feed. This difference also remains insignificant when compared to the control group not exposed to the Twitter feed during the reality competition show, $F(3,99) = .16, p = .85$. Thus, H1a and H1b were not supported.

H2 hypothesized that participants exposed to ethnic identity related tweets will have a higher level of social presence than those exposed to non-ethnic identity related tweets. The results showed that after exposure to the Twitter feed, there was no difference between the ethnic related feed ($M = 2.82, SD = .70$) and the non-ethnic related feed ($M = 2.82, SD = .74$) on social presence, $p = .60$ (see Table 4-3). This study did not find an effect of ethnic related Twitter feed on social presence. Thus, H2 was not supported.

5. DISCUSSION

After analyzing differences in Twitter feed exposure, with ethnic identity related tweets and non-ethnic identity related Tweets, this study demonstrates that there is no significant change on Hispanic and national ethnic identification.

SIT states that the groups to which individuals perceive to belong are believed to give them a sense of being in the social world. In addition, in order to enhance the image of self, individuals raise and enhance the status of the group as a whole. In this case, it is possible the participants exaggerated the similarities between the participants in order to categorize them all into one group. Thus, the sense of pride and self-esteem that is attached to belonging to a group of Hispanic individuals might have been high enough to maintain the level of Hispanic ethnic identification.

Along the same lines, previous research proposed social identity is more salient in the presence of out-group compared to in-group members [22]. Since the outgroup of “non-Hispanic” was not discussed in the Twitter feed because it was not present in the show, this may have resulted in no difference caused by the Twitter feed. Following SIT, perhaps the level of Hispanic ethnic identification was already at its achieved level, potentially from exposure to the show itself or maybe even self-perception, so that no significant change could be brought on by exposure to the Twitter feed. In this case, participants did not need to change level of identification according to the Twitter feed because it would maintain its level of salience since all participants were not exposed to the out-group, in this case non-Hispanics.

Earlier, it was hypothesized that simple exposure to an ethnic identity related feed as compared to a non-ethnic identity related would enhance the level of national ethnic identification. The basis for this argument is that because of the huge presence of the in-group, the higher the desire for an individual identity presentation, and this would come in the shape of a national ethnic identification (i.e. Mexican, Cuban, Colombian). This study found no significant differences between these groups, even followed by those not exposed to the Twitter feed. Similar to the explanation for the Hispanic ethnic identification above, it is possible that Hispanics see their national ethnic identification as a combination and expression of both their individual and social identities. It is important to understand that according to self-categorization theory, an individual has the ability to

establish both individual and social identities congruently. It is possible that level of national ethnic identification was already so salient in the presence of the participants on the show, that discussion or not of their ethnicity on the Twitter feed had no additional effects overall.

After analyzing the effects of exposure to the ethnic identity related Twitter feed on the level of social presence, this study found no significant differences between the two groups. An explanation for the lack of difference in level of social presence could be that participants either assumed no members of the outgroup were present or that the majority of the members were of the in-group. Therefore, whether the “people” on the feed discussed ethnicity or not, the fact that the show was being discussed at all was indicative of in-group belonging. Thus, the relationship between exposure to ethnicity-related Twitter feed during reality show watching and social presence is invalid, for no significant differences were seen with the influence of social presence.

5.1. LIMITATIONS AND FURTHER RESEARCH

An unexplored area of research in this study is the presence of ethnicity of the participants. With a larger sample, it would be interesting to analyze what the potential difference is, if any, of ethnic identification of participants, if the ethnicity of the participant was present on the show. For example, is there a higher level of identification amongst Puerto Rican participants because there was a Puerto Rican participant on the show as compared to the Venezuelan participants who did not have any representation on the show? In terms of in-group and out-group presence, it is possible that the presence of these alone could have potential effects.

Future research in this area is needed regarding minority ethnic groups. This study is limited in that it only measured potential individual and social identity differences within the Hispanic population. By the same token, it is possible to find potential differences within other ethnic minority groups. It is also possible that with the salient presence of an outgroup and in-group, changes could be found when discussing the specific ethnicities of the participants.

In addition, it is also recommended that the experimental conditions be most similar to real-life conditions. If available, the experiment should control for preferred manner of entertainment and preferred manner of social media. This is important for indicators of social presence, most closely recreating that sense of “being” in a comfortable state. This may yield different and more relevant findings in the increasingly diverse and technological society of tomorrow.

5.2. CONCLUSION

Hispanics are an ever-growing sector of the U.S. population. This segment of the minority ethnicity population only provides some representation for the potential different levels of identification, both social and individual. We investigated how the presence of ethnic identity related tweets affected Hispanic and national ethnic identification as well as social presence. Although the findings reveal no significant outcomes, it is clear that both social and individual identifications on the part of ethnic minorities is an important area of future research.

This study is an additional step in researching what television programming geared towards members of a specific ethnic group can result in terms of identification. It is also a first step in attempting to identify the specific instances that are required in order to make an individual identity more salient than a social one, in social media settings. Understanding what can facilitate a deeper sense of being not only within a community

but out of it, can lead to an even greater understanding of overall community in the ever-evolving demography of the U.S.

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