Transporting with WhatsApp:

The impact of enjoyment and transporting into World Cup broadcasts

**Abstract**

The World-Cup tournament is among the most popular and anticipated televised sports events. The current study examines how the enjoyment from and sense of transportation into the broadcasts influences the use of WhatsApp as a second screen app.

We assumed that a negative correlation would be found between the level of enjoyment and the scale of WhatsApp use during broadcasts, regarding non-game as well as game-related uses. We also assumed that these correlations would be mediated by the degree of transportation into the games.

Respondents (*N* = 454) completed an online questionnaire during the final days of the World Cup. Findings imply that using WhatsApp while watching broadcasts of the World Cup finals was correlated with degree of enjoyment: The more enjoyment viewers experienced, the less they used WhatsApp for non–game-related uses, and (contrary to our hypothesis) the more they used it for game-related issues. The relevance of enjoyment to second-screen use patterns becomes stronger when we examine the role of the mediated variable, transportation: the more enjoyment viewers experienced, the more transported they were into the game, which led to a significant rise in their game-related use of WhatsApp and a significant decline in their non–game-related uses of it.

**Introduction**

Ever since Katz and Dayan introduced the notion of Media Events (Dayan & Katz, 1992; Katz, 1980; Katz & Dayan, 1985), perceiving live television broadcasts of planned major occasions as significant national, social, and psychological events has become a starting point for an abundance of communication and media studies (Hepp & Couldry, 2010; Katz & Liebes, 2016; Rowe & Baker, 2012).

In recent years, changes have taken place in television viewing patterns during the broadcasts of media events, mainly the introduction of “second screens” (usually tablets and smartphones) that accompany viewing. Using second screens while watching television, a phenomenon that may be thought of as a type of “media multitasking” (Chang, 2017; Lang & Chrzan, 2015; Wang & Tchernev, 2012 ), affects the viewers’ attention, the information they receive, and their social conduct during the broadcast (Auverset, Billings, & Conlin, 2016; Cunningham & Eastin, 2017; Gantz, Fingerhut, & Nadorff, 2012; Gil De Zúñiga, Garcia-Perdomo, & McGregor, 2015; McGillivray, 2016; Rowe & Baker, 2012).

The World Cup soccer tournament, which takes place once every four years, is among the most popular and anticipated sports events worldwide. The broadcast of the World Cup soccer matches attracts hundreds of millions of viewers around the world, while the live broadcasts of the final games of the World Cup are some of the most widely viewed media events ever broadcasted (McGillivray, 2016). Using a second screen while watching mega-sports events like the World Cup broadcasts has been studied extensively during the past few years (Authors, 2019; Ganz, 2013; McGillivray, 2016; Tamir, 2018), but while most studies have examined the varied ways using a second screen affects viewers, the current study aims to explore the phenomenon from a different angle, asking how enjoyment from watching the games and a sense of transporting into the broadcasts might shape viewers’ patterns of second-screen use during these media events. Concretely, the study examines how enjoinment and transportation influence the use of smartphones and a popular interpersonal and group messaging application, WhatsApp.

WhatsApp is one of the most popular smartphone applications in recent years, and the number of users per month is estimated at 1.5 billion people worldwide (TechCrunch, 2018). The application enables users to send and receive text messages, videos, and audio files via their smartphone at negligible cost. One of the distinctive features of WhatsApp relevant to the current study is its ability to enable multiparticipant group communication without limiting the number of groups in which a user is a member, the volume of activity, or the content of messages transmitted.

Israeli users impressively adopted the WhatsApp application (Elishar-Malka, Ariel, & Avidar, 2019; Malka, Ariel, & Avidar, 2015; Malka, Ariel, Avidar, & Cohen, 2017). A study of Israeli millennials between the ages of 21 and 30 who use WhatsApp found that most of the interviewees reported changes in their romantic, social, familial, and professional relationships since the introduction of WhatsApp into their lives. When describing the characteristics of the application, the interviewees noted that, among other things, WhatsApp enables productive group activity for diverse family, social, and professional needs (Elishar-Malka et al., 2019). This study focuses on the use of WhatsApp among Israeli viewers of the televised broadcasts of the 2018 World Cup games.

*Watching Together*

Whether they are sports, politics, or other types of media events, one of the most common features associated with the watching experience is the added value of sharing the event with others (Harboe, Massey, Metcalf, Wheatley, & Romano, 2008; McDonald, 1986; Shin, 2016). Watching live television broadcasts, especially of significant events, is often a social activity undertaken with friends and family members (McDonald, 1986). Many viewers report that their enjoyment is greater when watching is shared (Wilson & Weiss, 1993). Researchers tend to regard live televised broadcasts of sports events that are particularly important nationally or internationally as media events in every aspect (Tamir, 2018). Studies of sports and media that focus on fans’ experience of watching televised games tend to emphasize the social dimension of viewing and the unifying effect of fans gathering to watch their favorite team. Whether the situation involves viewing with family and friends at home, watching a large screen in a bar or cafe, or workplace frameworks that allow for shared viewing of major sports, the possibility of sharing the viewing experience with other fans is seen as the most meaningful aspect for viewers (Auverset et al., 2016; Gantz, 2013; Gantz et al., 2012; Harboe et al., 2008; Hutchins & Rowe, 2012; Knobloch-Westerwick, David, Eastin, Tamborini, & Greenwood, 2009; Tamir, 2018).

*The Use of Second Screens While Watching*

Over the past few years, television viewing habits around the world have changed considerably. Gil de Zúñiga et al. (2015) defined the second-screen phenomenon as “a process in which individuals watching television use an additional electronic device or ‘screen’ to access the internet or social networking sites to obtain more information about the program or event they are watching or to discuss it in real-time” (p. 5). These authors refer to the use of a second screen in its broader context: “Second screening is a trending new media use that embodies one aspect of a phenomenon known as hybrid media and highlights the ubiquity of social media and connectedness in modern life” (p. 793). Klein-Shagrir (2018) points out that “the television’s liveness can be extended beyond the transmission itself by digital platforms and social networks in particular, which serve as a ‘second screen’” (p. 59).

Segijn, Voorveld, Vandeberg, Pennekamp, and Smit (2017) dedicated their study to questions of second-screen (or “multiscreen,” as they refer to the term) prevalence of use. These scholars found that almost 60% of the participants (*N* = 1,423) indicated to have used multiple screens simultaneously at least once during the study period. The T.V.–smartphone combination is the most prevalent use, compared with other second-screen combinations.

Hayat and Samuel-Azran (2017) remind us that “second screening is not merely about looking up information but also about engaging in conversations and interacting with others by logging into a social networking site” (p. 293). Indeed, Auverset et al. (2016) link use of social television to the “fear of missing out,” as the primary motive they identified in the choice to participate in second-screen activities while watching live television broadcasts of major events was the fear of being “out of the loop” of the following social discourse. In what might be understood as another indicator of the importance of understanding this phenomenon, Winter, Krämer, Benninghoff, and Gallus (2018) found that communicating with partners while watching television has a significant impact on the formation of viewers’ opinions on the content of the broadcasts, even at the expense of shaping an independent position or opinion.

Another term associated with second-screen habits of watching television is known as *media multitasking*. Lang and Chrzan (2015) defined *media multitasking* as “doing two tasks simultaneously, one of which involves media use.” In other words, the second screen may be thought of as one type of media multitasking (p. 100).

Wang and Tchernev (2012) have studied the reciprocal relationships between patterns of media multitasking and viewers’ needs and gratifications. Park, Rourke, and Bellur (2019) demonstrate how tweeting while watching television influences viewers’ sense of transportation and emotional responses in ways that lead to a reduction in their overall enjoyment of the show. Chang (2017) demonstrated the strong ties between sensation-seeking and media multitasking behaviors, adding, similar to studies in the past, the strong correlation between sensation-seeking and needs that are associated with media use.

*Second Screen in the Context of Live Sport Events*

Most sports fans tend to be emotionally invested in broadcasted events (Gantz, 2013; Hutchins & Rowe, 2012; Tamir, 2018). Therefore, it is only natural for them to want to share their expectations, excitement, joy, and disappointment in real-time with their peers. Using a second screen during the broadcast allows fans to communicate with each other even when they are unable to view the event in a shared physical space (Authors, 2019; Gantz et al., 2012). As a good illustration of this, Tamir (2020) analyzed discussions of sports fan groups on WhatsApp while viewing the 2018 World Cup games. He found that WhatsApp served as an extension of the primary viewing screen. The discussions were opinionated and emotional and included critiques of the games, broadcast quality, and the commentators' interpretations. Messages within these groups were furiously exchanged, and every major event on the field instantly became a topic of discussion in the groups.

In recent years, the use of a second screen and its effects on the experience of viewing sports broadcasts has been examined from several perspectives. The first perspective concerns the stretching of the boundaries of the shared viewing experience beyond the circle of those who are physically present. The second pertains to the implications of the entry of new players into the familiar relationship between fans and the traditional broadcast media (Billings, Qiao, Conlin, & Nie, 2015; Cunningham & Eastin, 2017; Gantz et al., 2012; Girginova, 2015; Hutchins & Rowe, 2012; Park et al., 2019; Phonthanukitithaworn & Sellitto, 2017; Rowe & Baker, 2012; Thorpe, 2017).

Some researchers focus on the economic aspects of the second-screen phenomenon during the televised broadcast of sports games (McGillivray, 2016; Segijn et al., 2017). However, most of the research is devoted to the psychological, social, and cultural implications of the phenomenon (Auverset et al., 2016; Hutchins & Rowe, 2012). For example, Gantz (2013) states that the use of social media while watching sports broadcasts strengthens social ties and a sense of belonging creates a platform for expression of a wide range of feelings, emotions, and opinions related to the game. It also increases the weight of the importance of the sport within the viewer’s life in general. Phonthanukitithaworn and Sellitto (2017) note the profound emotional and behavioral influences of this phenomenon on sports fans. They argue that the use of a second screen in these circumstances contributes to reinforcing feelings of fraternity and community among fans who are members of a social media group that interacts during the viewing time.

While the majority of studies in this field tend to focus on the effects of second-screen use when watching a media event, only a few studies have looked in the opposite direction of influence: the effects that certain broadcast-related emotions and feelings have on the way viewers utilize the second screen. For example, Cunningham and Eastin (2017) find that the more important, interesting, and dramatic the broadcast game is, the greater the tendency to use a second screen, especially among more loyal fans, whose level of engagement with the group is high in the first place. Referring to the feeling of involvement associated with engagement, the researchers determined that “This sense of involvement should translate from the first screen to the second screen” (p. 293).

According to Gil de Zúñiga et al. (2015) and Gil de Zúñiga and Liu (2017), the use of a second screen while watching political media events leads to increased engagement with those events. The motivation attributed to the use of a second screen in the circumstances under discussion is twofold: searching for relevant information and participating in discussions and debates that occur during the broadcast and that directly relate to it (Gil de Zúñiga et al., 2015).

*Transportation Theory*

Exposure to the media in general and television viewing in particular evokes in the viewer psychological mechanisms such as identification, empathy, involvement, and being emotionally carried away (Tukachinsky & Tokunaga, 2013).According to Transportation Theory (Gerrig, 1993; Green & Brock, 2000), media consumers sometimes go through a process in which they are transported into a narrative, whereby their thoughts and attention are focused on the events occurring in it. In this transportation process, audience members enter the world presented in the narrative and temporarily lose access to the real world (Green & Brock, 2000). In this process, people are entirely focused on a specific activity in fields such as sport, work, or art and are not attentive to other aspects of their surroundings (Csikszentmihalyi, 1997). Gerrig and Sestir (2020) describe the importance of the transportation process:

 Transportation is not only a powerful experience in the moment but also a key moderator for the influence of media consumption on those who consume it.

Individuals who are more transported into narratives are also more likely to experience effects ranging from simple enjoyment to changes in specific beliefs to alterations in fundamental worldviews, and even shifts in self-concept. (p. 1)

Transportation occurs more frequently during exposure to narratives. When individuals are transported into a narrative, their mental resources are fully employed to concentrate on the narrative, and this enables them to be completely absorbed by it (Tal-Or & Cohen, 2010). In most cases, people are focused on a specific activity that is part of their immediate reality, while in transportation, the focus is on an alternative reality (Busselle & Bilandzic, 2009).

*Transportation and Enjoyment*

Consumption of media is often a pleasant and positive experience (Bosshart & Macconi, 1998; Zillmann & Bryant, 1994). According to Krcmar and Renfro (2005), to describe enjoyment, researchers use concepts such as appreciation, attraction, preference, and liking. The process of transportation is particularly important to psychologists and media scholars because it was found to be a significant contributor to the enjoyment of texts (Green, Brock, & Kaufman, 2004). Enjoyment is the result of the combination of psychological, emotional, and cognitive components (Davidson, 2003). Green and Brock (2000) emphasize the similarity between flow, transportation, and engagement and state that engagement is a pleasant experience. Green and Sestir (2020) argue that *flow* is a more general term than *transportation* since it refers to the effortless ways in which one’s skills are being met with the challenges of the activity involved. Transportation, they claim, is focused more on the narratives that provoke one’s emotions and imagination alongside the absorption of the engagement in the activity involved.

People find mediated experiences enjoyable when they are immersed in the narratives of the media and experience a temporary escape from reality (Green & Brock, 2002; Green et al., 2004). Green (2004) found that increased transportation was associated with increased perceptions of realism, a variable known to be an important factor in audience enjoyment (e.g., Ang, 1985; Cohen and Ribak, 2003; Corner, 1992). Another way that the effects of transportation on the enjoyment from the narrative can be explained is through the mediating role of identifying with characters (Green et al., 2004). Warren (2020) found that the more times a person watched, as well as the longer each viewing session was, the higher the level of transportation. Thus, the intensive weeks surrounding the World Cup soccer tournament might heighten this process.

Based on the literature, our hypotheses are as follows:

H1: Enjoyment from watching the games is correlated with second-screen use: A negative correlation will be found between the level of enjoyment and non–game-related use, as well as with game-related use of WhatsApp, while watching the games.

H2: The correlation between enjoyment from watching the games and second-screen use (game-related as well as non–game-related) will be mediated by the degree of transportation into the games.

**Methodology**

*Participants*

Respondents who answered the filter questions affirmatively (Do you have a smartphone? Do you have WhatsApp installed on your smartphone? Do you watch the World Cup soccer matches?) completed an online panel questionnaire (*N* = 454). The sample was representative of the distribution of the Israeli population, according to the Central Bureau of Statistics. Respondents were aged 18 to 64 years, with a mean age of 38.9 years (*SD* = 13.7). Most of the respondents were married (57%) and nonreligious (66%) and had academic education (60%); 58% of them were men, and 42% were women.

*Research Tool*

The research questions were examined through a structured questionnaire that included 60 closed questions (demographic questions, the viewing experience, viewing habits, and behavior while watching a game(.

The questionnaire included the following variables:

**Independent variable.** To assess enjoyment, we used a 4-item scale (α = .97) rated from 1, *severely disagree* to 5, *strongly agree*. Participants were instructed to indicate the extent to which they agreed with the statements (e.g., “I enjoy watching soccer games”; “I am happy when I watch soccer games”).

**Dependent variables.** To assess game-related second-screen use, we used a 7-item scale (α = .89) rated from 1, *strongly disagree* to 5, *strongly agree*. Participants were instructed to indicate the extent to which they agreed with the statements (e.g., “I write WhatsApp messages about the game,” “I call friends who watch the game to share experiences from the game”). To assess non–game-related second-screen use, we used a 4-item scale (α = .69) rated from 1, *strongly disagree* to 5, *strongly agree*. Participants were instructed to indicate the extent to which they agreed with the statements (e.g., “I answer phone calls”; “I reply to WhatsApp messages that are not on the topic of the game”).

**Mediating variables**. To assess transportation, we used Green and Brock’s transportation scale (Green & Brock, 2000) with minor adjustments. As in many other studies, and for similar reasons, shorter versions of the questionnaire were used (Appel, Gnambs, Richter, & Green, 2015). In this study, the scale comprised seven statements (α = .87) rated from 1, *strongly disagree* to 5, *strongly agree*. Participants were instructed to indicate the extent to which they agreed with the statements (e.g., “While watching the game, I thought only of the game, not of what was going on around me,” “While watching the game, I felt I was part of the game”).

*Research Process*

The questionnaire was distributed during the final 10 days of the World Cup, from the quarterfinals to the final. First, potential respondents were asked a filter question. Those who indicated they do watch the game were sent the questionnaire for completion. The final sample included only questionnaires that were complete by the end of the survey and after verifying the completion time (between 2 minutes to 15 minutes).

**Results**

To examine the first hypothesis, that enjoyment is correlated with second-screen use, we conducted a Pearson correlation test. As we hypothesized, a negative correlation was found between enjoyment and non–game-related use of WhatsApp while watching the games (*r* = –.35, *p* < .001). Contrary to our hypothesis, though, a positive correlation was found between enjoyment and game-related uses of WhatsApp (*r* = .31, *p* < .001). Thus, increased enjoyment from the game increases the second-screen use if it is game-related and reduces the use if it is not game-related (see Table 1).

Table 1

*Research Variable Correlations*

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Transportation | Non–game-related use | Game-related use |
| Enjoyment | .742\*\*\* | .314\*\*\* | –.348\*\*\* |
| Transportation |  | –.40\*\*\* | .33\*\*\* |

To examine the second hypothesis, concerning the mediating role of transportation in the relation between enjoyment from the watching experience and second-screen use while watching, we used Hayes’ (2018) PROCESS bootstrapping command with 5,000 iterations (model 4). The analysis treated *enjoyment* as a predicting variable, *game-related use of WhatsApp* as the first dependent variable, *non-soccer use of WhatsApp* as the second dependent variable, and *transportation* as the mediating variable. No direct correlation was found between enjoyment and non–game-related use; the 95% confidence interval for the direct effect included 0 (95% CI [–.167, –.005] with 5,000 resamples). A direct correlation was found between enjoyment and game-related use; the 95% confidence interval for the direct effect did not include 0 (95% CI [.018, .176] with 5,000 resamples). Moreover, two indirect models were found: the 95% confidence interval for the indirect effect of enjoyment on non–game-related use through transportation did not include 0 (95% CI [–.228, –.085] with 5,000 resamples; F[3, 439] = 42.80*,* *p* < .001, Rsq = 16.32%). Moreover, results also showed that the 95% confidence interval for the indirect effect of enjoyment on game-related use through transportation did not include 0 (95% CI [.031, .151] with 5,000 resamples, F[2, 439] = 29.16, *p* < .001, Rsq = 11.07%). In other words, two paths of serial mediation between enjoyment and second-screen use were found: one path passes through transportation on game use, and simultaneously, a mediation path passes through transportation on non–game-related use. These two paths are significant. The model indicates indirect effects of enjoyment on second-screen use (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. The Mediating Model of Transportation in the Relationship Between Enjoyment and Second-Screen Use

.10\*

.14\*\*

.64\*\*\*

Enjoyment

Transportation

Soccer-related

–.24\*\*\*

Non-soccer-related use

.08–

\*p < .05. \*\*p < .01. \*\*\*p < .001.

**Discussion**

The findings of this study imply that the second-screen phenomenon, and specifically using WhatsApp while watching the live broadcasts of the World Cup finals, is strongly correlated with the degree of enjoyment from the watching experience. This correlation is evident in a direct correlation between enjoyment and use patterns: the more enjoyment viewers experience as a result of watching the live broadcasts, the more they use WhatsApp for game-related issues while watching and the less they use it for non–game-related issues. The relevance of enjoyment to second-screen use patterns becomes much stronger when the role of the mediated variable, *transportation*, is examined: the more enjoyment viewers experience, the more transported they are into the game, which leads to a significant rise in their game-related use of WhatsApp and a significant decline in their non–game-related uses of this smartphone application.

In other words, this study serves as another indicator of the meaningful part that certain second-screen uses have in the overall experience of watching live broadcasts of major sports events on television. As viewers’ feelings of enjoyment from and transporting into the game rise, they become much more selective in their WhatsApp uses, as if non–game-related uses can hardly pass through the gatekeeping effect of transportation. At the same time, game-related uses flourish under the same condition, becoming an integrated element of the overall experience of transporting and enjoyment.

These findings may also be analyzed considering a previous study by the same authors (2019). That study examined (among other things) the effects of using WhatsApp while watching the World Cup games on the level of engagement with and enjoyment from the watching experience. The findings indicated a clear connection between the viewers’ engagement with the broadcasts and enjoyment of watching them, a relationship that was mediated through the use of WhatsApp as a second screen. The nature of the connection depended on the relevance of the content transmitted via WhatsApp to the broadcast: Game-related content and uses led to a positive correlation between the levels of engagement and enjoyment, while non–game-related content and uses led to a negative correlation between these variables.

The current research contributes to the existing research literature on second-screen use in the context of live television broadcasts of major sports events by adding another layer to our understanding of the role that smartphones in general, and WhatsApp in particular, play as part of the overall watching experience. At the same time, it has a few limitations that should be addressed in future studies: Although this study focused on one of the most popular media events worldwide, we may not be able to extend its findings to other types of live broadcasts, either of major games or different areas of action. Future studies should also look beyond the role of WhatsApp and examine other smartphone applications and uses. Comparative research of different cultures and societies may further enrich our understanding of the current phenomena, as the findings from the Israeli scene may not apply to other countries. One last note: as the classic characteristics of media events change in front of our eyes, mainly due to the growing presence of second screens as well as their multilayer influence on people under such circumstances, media scholars should join an effort to review the theory and suggest some needed adaptations to the current media environment.

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