

Facebook tries to get into TV game

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World-class athletes aren't the only ones with Olympic hopes. Facebook Inc. participated in a different kind of trial in London: whether it can extend its online popularity to the television airwaves and compete with Twitter Inc. for airtime.

[Facebook](#) and [Twitter](#) each played up their partnerships with [Comcast Corp.](#)'s NBCUniversal, which broadcast the Summer Games. The rivals tracked online chatter that was then featured on an NBC segment called "The Social Download" and on the NBC website and [mobile apps](#).

As Twitter continued to reign as the go-to place to gab about TV on the Web, Facebook used the world stage of the Olympics as a launchpad for a new feature called Talk Meter, which kept NBC viewers informed on which athletes and events Facebook's nearly 1 billion users were buzzing about.

Ryan Seacrest gave Facebook a prime-time shout-out last week, pointing out that seven out of the 10 most popular moments on Facebook from the Summer Games involved [female athletes](#) and that the U.S. women's soccer team, after winning the gold medal showdown, had 200 times as many Facebook fans as its Japanese rival.

NBC said Facebook and Twitter drove [viewership](#) and increased engagement with the Olympics, particularly among teens, an elusive and coveted demographic for TV networks.

"There is no question that their performance was worthy of a medal,"

NBC Olympics President Gary Zenkel said in a phone interview from London. "Certainly our prime-time ratings suggest this is all resonating."

The prime-time exposure was a big score for Facebook and Twitter. With access to tens of millions of viewers, each had the opportunity to broaden its appeal with users and advertisers as they face growing doubts about their businesses. It also gave them a taste of a lucrative market: the \$68 billion spent last year on TV advertising.

"The majority of programming will have this as part of its DNA in the future," predicted Mark Ghuneim, chief executive of social analysis firm Trendrr.

More of the digital audience at home is talking back to the TV and, increasingly, is being heard, whether swapping comments on Facebook or squawking on Twitter.

Broadcasters know younger viewers are checking Facebook and Twitter, and not just during the commercials. So they are encouraging viewers to chat online about TV shows and live televised events so they tune in and not out. The TV industry is banking that the "second screen" on tablets and other mobile devices can drive viewership and deliver more ad revenue.

"It's undeniable that our audience - certainly portions of audience - are actively participating on Twitter, Facebook or both during the course of the broadcast," Zenkel said. "We believe that can only help generate more engagement and more interest."

Now Facebook is looking to make a bigger splash in TV. Twitter has a head start, getting on average three-quarters of the [social media](#) activity around broadcast TV while Facebook gets 16 percent, according to Trendrr. When it comes to sports or other televised events, Twitter

dominates, Trendrr found.

"This was Facebook saying the social experience on TV is an undeniably important market," Ghuneim said. "And what better petri dish than the Olympics?"

A team of Facebook researchers pinpointed trends by crunching data from chatter taking place on its service, slicing and dicing by key demographics such as age, gender and location. NBC highlighted the results on the air and on its website. NBC also promoted a daily poll on Facebook about the Olympics.

For instance, at the start of the Olympic Games, swimmer Michael Phelps was already going for the gold on Facebook. After the first week of the Games, chatter about Phelps dwarfed President Barack Obama, his Republican challenger Mitt Romney, even pop heartthrob Justin Bieber.

"It gives NBC unprecedented insight into what viewers are doing and thinking about during the Games," said Rob D'Onofrio, Facebook's head of audience insights.

Facebook says it plans to deploy Talk Meter for other live television events such as the Super Bowl and the Oscars. But social media analysts say TV is still far from its goal of becoming a two-way medium.

"The consumer voice is quickly becoming the new sweeps," Altimeter Group analyst Brian Solis said. "NBC and any network covering live events must now think about designing integrated experiences across the screens in ways that go beyond just sharing social data."

"The media still underestimates the role of social media," Solis said. "They don't yet understand the impact of social media on tune-in and on

the ability to sell against it. I imagine that by the 2014 Winter Olympics, we'll have a much better sense of what's possible."

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