Periscope live streaming could turn the tables on the rise of video-on-demand

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Return to the old ways of doing things? Credit: Infrogmation, CC BY-SA

That live streaming app Periscope, which allows a real-time video

broadcast from a phone to the internet, has been acquired by Twitter and represents the next logical step in the process that has seen social media integrated into every facet of daily life.

This purchase incorporates Periscope into a platform that is already a gateway to news feeds and live streams of every imaginable type. It also reveals an increasingly sophisticated business model that offers hope of long-term viability for the company.

Events from all over the world have already raised the profile of live streaming: debates are already being had over whether the imminent UK general election or even next year's US elections will be the "Periscope election". UK users, such as Sky News's Joe Tidy, have led the live streaming charge with Periscope and then for posterity through Vine, Twitter's other video service, that allows users to post and share short, 10-second bursts of video.

Social media has asked us to share our thoughts through status updates, tweets, images and videos of our day. Now live streaming cuts out the detail and messy complexity of processing uploaded files. It also removes any opportunity for the uploader to consider their content or pause for cautious reflection on its appropriateness. The inspiration of Periscope lie in live news reporting, and anyone familiar with television journalism will recognise the concept behind live streaming – as well as the potential risks.

Live streaming is not a new concept; live video-sharing apps such as Qik has become a virtual veteran of the genre, while Livestream, Meerkat, and uStream offer direct competition. Another indication of the emerging importance of live streaming is Livestream's introduction of Broadcaster, a piece of internet connectivity hardware that adds live streaming capabilities to professional broadcast-quality cameras.

Although we shouldn't write-off Meerkat, which has been [first to produce an Android app](#), what Periscope competitors all lack is a massive established user base. Twitter's role as the gateway to Periscope brings tens of millions of users who have developed specific ways of interacting with their [social media](#) platform, whether through Twitter's website, through the official or third-party mobile phone apps, or others like Tweetdeck. This also includes Meerkat. Live streaming is now just one further feature that Twitter users can deploy, with a very low learning curve.

As the gatekeeper, Twitter now also holds the keys to how Periscope-powered citizen reporting will develop and the potential creation of [hundreds or even thousands of community broadcasters](#). In what could also be seen as a threat to traditional broadcasters, Periscope provides the capability to create an entirely new level of reality television – one that will eat into the reality game shows genre popularised by the likes of Big Brother and "structured reality" televisions series such as Made in Chelsea.

However, a quick scan of Periscope streams reveals the variety of content: someone walking behind their family through a holiday resort; walking home through darkened streets after a night out; and a show enticingly labelled with the tweet: "Don't miss out ladies". Of course as live broadcasts, all have now been and gone. There is no catch-up nor version posted on YouTube. Most controversially – and to the dismay of large channels and TV studios – it's easy to find [streams of television programmes](#) and sporting events, content for which the broadcasting rights are jealously guarded.

However, any sample of Periscope streams reveals mostly the mundane – streams that would require major effort by structured reality show scriptwriters to make them worth watching, never mind justifying the insertion of advertising. Placing technology intended for professional use

into the hands of end consumers does not usually make for high-quality results – an observation already well proven with desktop publishing, video editing and music creation software. Periscope provides a complete separation of the technological means and tools required for live streaming from the skills and knowledge needed to make those live streams viewable and, hopefully, interesting.

Interest will still be found with the live capture of the actions of famous people. In the midst of an election campaign, streaming offers the opportunity for citizen reporters to capture the gaffes and errors of candidates. The last UK election campaign saw controversy generated with the help of the then prime minster Gordon Brown live [broadcasting his own inopportune comments](#) through a radio microphone. It would be a stretch to claim that these statements lost him the election – but they certainly contributed.

With recognition that [view-on-demand is becoming the preferred means to watch television](#), the prospect is that Periscope could draw us back to a live viewing schedule of Periscope-structured reality. The problem, for traditional broadcasters at least, is that these shows will now be seen through Twitter and then on endless repeat through Twitter's other video technology, Vine.

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