

For decades, television's most successful shows have arguably led the national conversation. Now Twitter could eclipse the small screen's historic role, or at least significantly enhance it.

TV analysts stress that the Twitter-verse is but a small subset of the TV audience, particularly for big shows on big channels. While the final of *The X Factor* recently attracted 500,000 tweets, the show garnered 13.1 million viewers at its peak.

However, social media in general and Twitter in particular have caught the attention of

we don't know how many people read the tweets, but it does indicate engagement," says Tom Weiss, founder of TV Genius.

Television and social media actually have a lot to gain from each other in this digital world, but there is also a lot of mutual suspicion.

The emerging relationship between social media and TV is set to undergo big changes in 2012. Broadcasters and producers are developing more experiments and partnerships in order to align television more effectively with social media.

For broadcasters the aim is to increase engagement with audiences, attract new view-

# Nielsen records TV's blood pressure... Twitter is its heartbeat

Kate Bulkley takes the pulse of television's Twitter stream



Tom Weiss  
TV Genius

**Twitter doesn't indicate reach... but it does indicate engagement**

TV executives, not least because the medium skews towards the important younger demographic: some 47% of UK 16- to 34-year-olds regularly use social media while watching TV, according to Deloitte/Gfk UK.

Ben Stephenson, controller of BBC drama commissioning, recently told a Broadcasting Press Guild lunch that social media campaigns around shows such as *Luther* and *Sherlock* are huge.

He said: "I think the power of Twitter is that it's a communal experience, whether you are in the same room as other viewers or not."

The finale of the second series of *Sherlock* demonstrates how audiences use Twitter as a live "water-cooler moment". In the 90 minutes before the show began there were 24,000 tweets related to the programme.

During transmission, this grew to 56,000 and peaked at 66,000 in the 90 minutes following broadcast, according to statistics gathered by TV Genius, part of Red Bee Media (see chart opposite).

"Twitter doesn't indicate reach because

ers and - with luck - bring in new revenues.

Meanwhile, the social sites are also keen to deepen ties with television. Twitter's Chloe Sladden, who is in charge of media partnerships, told an audience in New York late last year: "If Nielsen is the blood pressure of TV, I'd like you to think of Twitter as the heartbeat. It's the ECG of attention around a show."

"There is a range of things to do that cuts through the social noise out there and also rewards our viewers," says Aidan Conway, head of digital entertainment at Sky.

Sky has invented "super fan" points for creative "shares" on Facebook, held live Twitter chats with the stars of *Strike Back* and created fan shows such as *The Gleekly*, which gives *Glee* devotees extra content.

The pay-TV platform has also held live tweet-a-longs for Sky Movies titles, including *Lethal Weapon*.

Conway believes in "rewarding" people by reflecting their comments back to them as fast as possible. "Once we started having Davina McCall read fans' comments live on

*Got To Dance*, the conversation became much more intelligent and viewers competed to have their comments read out."

ITV is delighted that *The Only Way Is Essex* was the third-most-popular topic on Facebook for UK users last year, just behind the Royal Wedding and the summer riots. But the problem is that the commercial broadcaster failed to monetise this.

"Who doesn't want to be talked about on Twitter and Facebook?" asks Richard Williams, director of multiplatform programming at ITV. "Our problem is making sense of it all. The question for us is: how do you engage

voice on social networks matches that."

Channel 4 asks all its high-profile screen talent, such as Jimmy Carr, Jamie Oliver, Eva Longoria and Derren Brown, to follow the Twitter accounts related to their shows and even to re-tweet Channel 4-scripted tweets if, say, a show is returning.

The channel has also created genre accounts on Twitter, such as @Channel4Food to pool together like-minded programmes in order to help audiences discover content.

The station's live continuity announcers tweet regularly, and Channel 4 has been an early adopter of GetGlue, a social check-in

increase in social-media buzz before a show premiered raised ratings by 1%.

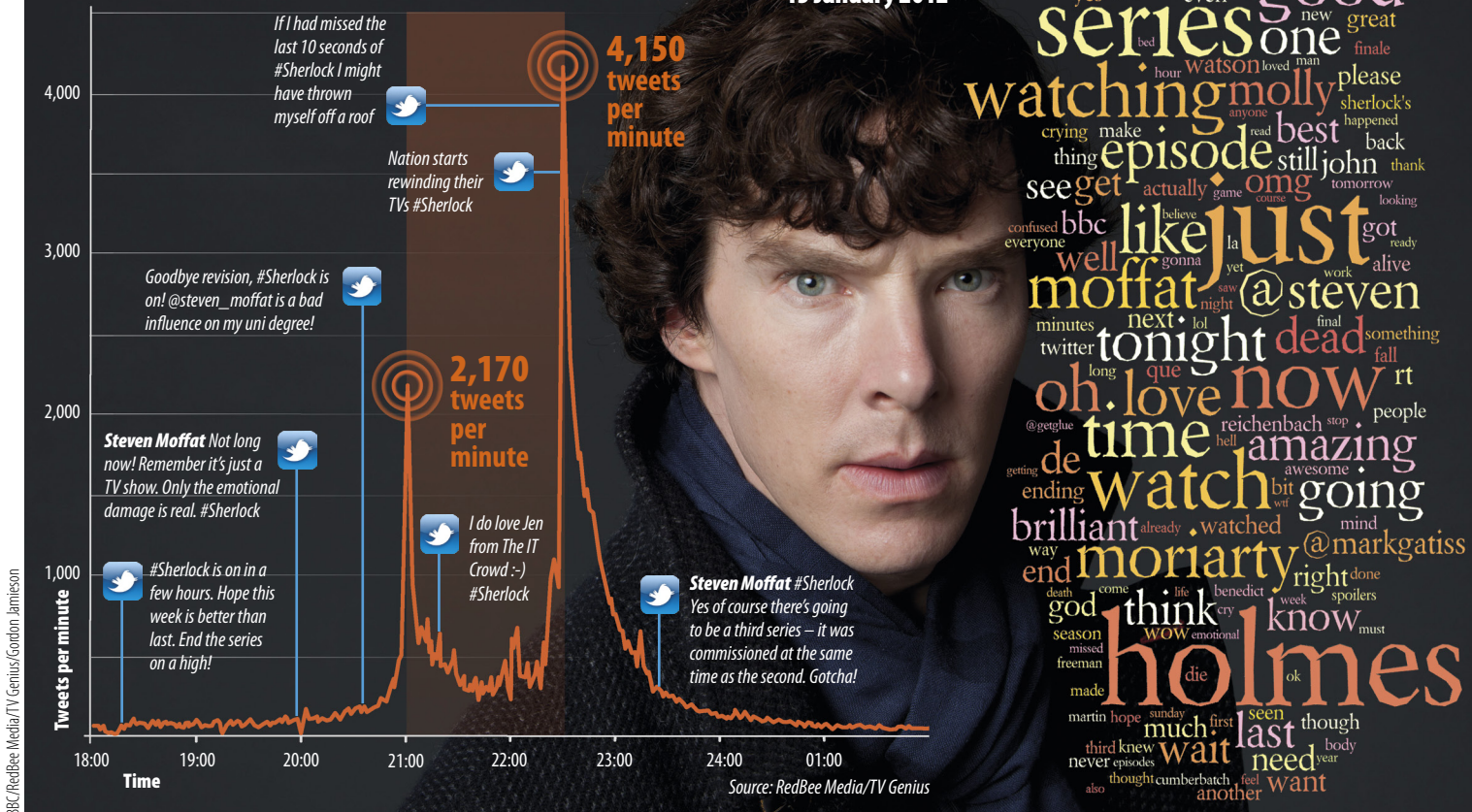
UK experts remain cautious about such links. Instead, they prefer more experimentation regarding monetising social media traffic, because at the moment there is no straightforward model.

The rise of companion-screen viewing applications, such as Zeebox (in which Sky holds a 10% stake) and GetGlue, both of which allow viewers to "socialise" their TV viewing on smartphones and tablets, is complicating things.

Ideally, a broadcaster such as ITV would

## Tweets per minute during the *Sherlock* series finale

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with that social-media audience and make money out of it?"

After several years of ignoring sites such as YouTube, ITV changed course last year. Programme clips and live auditions were showcased on YouTube, while the structure of daytime show *This Morning* was upended in order to incorporate Facebook, Twitter and Skype.

Last month ITV began embedding video directly onto Facebook pages; there are big plans for *Emmerdale* and social media, including writing storylines that allow the plot to unfold on the web between episodes.

But there are dangers for broadcasters more accustomed to directing audiences from programme to programme on linear channels.

For example, fans of *Got To Dance* might react negatively if told about an unrelated show on their fan hashtag. "There is a danger on Twitter of us being your dad at the disco," says ITV's Williams. "People are having a nice time talking about our shows. We haven't been invited to join in, so we need to make sure our

service. *Misfits* writers have scripted tweets for the series's characters.

"We don't have a social-media department, so programmes [that are not on air] have sort of been left to go into hibernation. But now with the genre accounts we can ramp it up," says Channel 4's digital communications manager, Colin Watkins.

Beyond getting the tone of voice right, the commercial broadcasters are keen to figure out how to correlate Twitter traffic and Facebook likes with increased TV viewership of their programmes.

Says Sky's Conway: "The holy grail is 10%, where 1 million TV viewers is 100,000 social users. We found that with Sky Arts last summer every time we added more content online, we added a couple of thousand to Facebook.

"We also know that 20% of the people who watched the Sky Arts Festival coverage on TV had found out about it on the social web."

A controversial piece of research conducted last autumn in the US by NM Incite, a Nielsen/McKinsey subsidiary, found that a 9%

like audiences to go to ITV.com to watch advertiser-funded catch-up, or companion content such as a recipe being cooked on *This Morning*.

But the rise and rise of social media – not forgetting the proliferation of apps – makes that approach look old-fashioned.

Williams says that ITV is now keen "to have a presence on any platform where our audience is. The focus is on increasing online sponsorships and to make social engagement part of the overall sale to advertisers.

Adds Sky's Conway: "It's about keeping a real relationship with the user on FB, Twitter and YouTube – and also with bloggers."

Last year Sky created a "secret speakeasy" in Islington around the preview screening of *Boardwalk Empire* for about 75 bloggers, who collectively reach 6.5 million people on social media.

Conway admits that proving a direct correlation between buzz and viewing is "complicated", but adds that at the moment it is important to "be in the game".