

# Study Links TV Viewership and Twitter Conversations

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## (ENGLISH)

A Nielsen study affirmed the idea that Twitter chatter during prime-time shows can sometimes cause a “significant increase” in the ratings.

A first-of-its-kind study by Nielsen has affirmed what nearly everyone in the television industry already suspected: Twitter conversations sometimes do cause people to turn on the TV.

The study, to be released on Tuesday, examined Twitter chatter and minute-by-minute Nielsen ratings of 221 episodes of prime-time shows on major networks. Most of the time, there was no statistically significant relationship between the two sets of data. But Twitter messages were shown to cause a “significant increase” in ratings 29 percent of the time, said Mike Hess, an executive vice president at Nielsen and the senior researcher involved in the study.

A causal connection was also shown in the other direction: that is, the ratings had an effect on the volume of related messages 48 percent of the time. Some genres of shows were much more likely to benefit from Twitter conversation than others.

“Over all, this does validate that additional research around this influence is worth pursuing,” Mr. Hess said. Nielsen and Twitter are business partners —they are promoting a new metric called a Nielsen Twitter TV Rating that measures online conversations about shows —so the study may provoke some skepticism. Its findings, though, are likely to be cheered by networks and marketing firms that have invested heavily in social media. Anecdotes about spikes in the ratings credited to Twitter chatter have given producers and advertisers new hopes of assembling mass audiences.

Mitchell J. Lovett, a professor at the University of Rochester who has studied Twitter-television correlations, said that demonstrating causality had proved difficult in the past.

“It is hard to distinguish whether Twitter (or other social media) activity simply reflects existing interest (the person talks about the show because of an interest in watching or plans to watch) rather than causes it,” he wrote via e-mail. For that reason, the Nielsen study “could be groundbreaking,” he said, though he cautioned that he had not examined its methodology yet.

: Nielsen ratings; Social networks

/: : University of Rochester; NAICS: 611310; : Twitter Inc; NAICS: 519130

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