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Mobile Television
Paul Torre
Southern Illinois University Carbondale

- How can cell phone technology shift television viewing practices, gaps, and divides?
- What about other mobile viewing devices?
- What challenge does this represent for the television industry?

Questions about the prospects of *mobile television* can be approached from the two distinct angles of this conjunction: First, given the many complications in the U.S. mobile market, how is the cell phone industry incorporating distribution of television and video content into their service portfolio? And second, how is the embattled television industry responding to a fragmenting audience that is migrating to the Internet, gaming, and to their mobile devices for media consumption? The limited partnerships to this point between the network/cable outlets and the online (i.e. iTunes) and mobile (i.e. Verizon V-Cast) distributors of television content, indicate an overall reluctance to *share* across differentiated industries—reflecting concerns about cannibalism of revenues and the mistrust often exhibited in corporate culture clash.

The rollout and adoption of mobile television depends upon the interplay between mobile handset technologies and mobile service infrastructures, which precedes and provides the basis for mobile content delivery. Countries in Europe and Asia have developed advanced devices, and their infrastructures have been built out through an effective blend of public and private research and funding. In the United States, in both categories, we are behind, with incompatible cell phone devices and vast chunks of our geography operating on sub-3G networks. Forays into mobile content, repurposed from television or the Internet, have begun stateside, but the division of the revenue streams between the content providers and the wireless operators is still being hammered out. Limited service of mobile television has recently launched: Verizon and AT&T have partnered with Qualcomm's FLO TV in select metropolitan areas. In this respect, the promise of full-length simulcast and time-shifted programming from CBS, MSNBC, MTV, FOX Sports, and Nickelodeon, is a substantial shift from mobisodes of "24" or an iPod download of "The Office." This year-old service represents a significant development in service and content that looks to finally affect TV viewing patterns. Or at least you would think it would. Early adoption numbers, however, are less than promising, with FLO TV only attracting 100,000 customers from the two leading U.S. cell phone companies. The third-largest domestic distributor, Sprint, is in talks with South Korea's SK Telecom—perhaps global expertise and investment will be the game-changer? Thus far, the dearth of affordable, compatible handsets, and the restrictions of long-term contracts make adoption, early and otherwise, of mobile television a slow process.

The television industry has seen combined domestic advertising and international sales revenues flatten and fall over the course of a decade. The loss of stable and predictable audiences for television, both here and abroad, has been minimized and denied, while new media industries have sought to develop their business models and audiences, contributing to a much more competitive media landscape. After several years of limited partnerships, the television industry is moving more directly into new sectors, popping up on iPods and ramping up efforts to meet viewers online at their own network sites, with these proprietary spaces presented as alternatives to independent efforts from Joost to Hulu. With broadband penetration at about 25% in the U.S., there are viewers able and interested in avoiding appointment television or TV by DVR. The television industry will consider the mobile screen as a more attractive source of revenue when that audience grows substantially, and when they can land on a revenue sharing model with the distributors. Other mobile viewing devices, like DVD players, the Sony PSP, the short-lived Portable DVR for DISH, and video iPods, represent even less consistent revenue streams. As television content is distributed across converging industries, the challenges faced by previously distinct industries are many and varied.

Last century, media conglomeration eliminated competition between the television content production and distribution businesses. We have yet to see how the mobile television industries will resolve similar complications in their business models.