“Understanding on-line users: effort as a new variable”

Manuel José Damásio, Diogo Morais; Carlos Poupa;, Paulo Ferreira

cpoupa@gmail.com; diogo.morais@ulusofona.pt; mjdamasio@ulusofona.pt; pferreira@ulusofona.pt

Relatório de Trabalho

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Investigador Responsável: Manuel José Carvalho de Almeida Damásio

Instituição Proponente: Universidade Lusófona de Humanidades e Tecnologias; Centro de Investigação em Comunicação Aplicada, Cultura e Novas Tecnologias (CICANT); COFAC, Cooperativa de Formação e Animação Cultural, CRL (COFAC)

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Abstract

Internet and TV are very often understood as media in competition. As before, with other media, there is a common belief that one media is going to kill the other. The true, as we all know, is that old media can survive and coexist with new media.

Internet, as new media and candidate do replace the old TV, is a very complex one. First, internet is definetely not a single reality. It is a set of activities so diverse as mail, games, online newspapers, chat, blogging, youtube or hi5. It is certainly not obvious as each one of these contributes to the internet as a whole in the mind of the audience.

In this paper we try to investigate the question of the competition between TV and the internet as a competition between TV and the different kind of activities available through the internet. So, our first goal is to represent TV and the internet experiences in a common space and provide one interpretation for that space. A second goal is to go further and try to learn from that representation more about the kind of competition the TV is facing from the internet.

This study uses MDS to build the spacial map and find a set of common dimensions for TV and for the internet activities. Not surprisingly, the results show that watching TV is a rather unique experience, distant from all the internet activities. In a two-dimensional space, TV seems to occupy a unique quadrant, in opposition to a set of internet activities which main characteristic is the fact that they are forms of personalization and personnel expression. On the other hand, TV seems opposed to another set of internet activities that are associated with some sort of effort.

The 2-dimensional space, with an axis of personal versus impersonal interaction and an axis of non-effort versus effort interaction seems to be an accurate representation of both the internet activities and the TV experience. In this joint internet/TV 2-dimensional space of communication TV reveals itself as a media characterized by impersonality and an absence of effort from the audience. Internet activities, on the contrary, show a big diversity in these two dimensions. Impersonality in the internet ranges from high values in site building to very low values in chat or mail. Effort in the internet ranges from high values in site building to very low values in hi5 or email.

Methods

A self-filled questionnaire was applied to a sample of 1,932 individuals, from which 599 (31%) were female and 1333 (69%) were male. Their age was between 12-18 years old. The majority of these, 1632 (94%), were students from Secondary Education and Further Education.

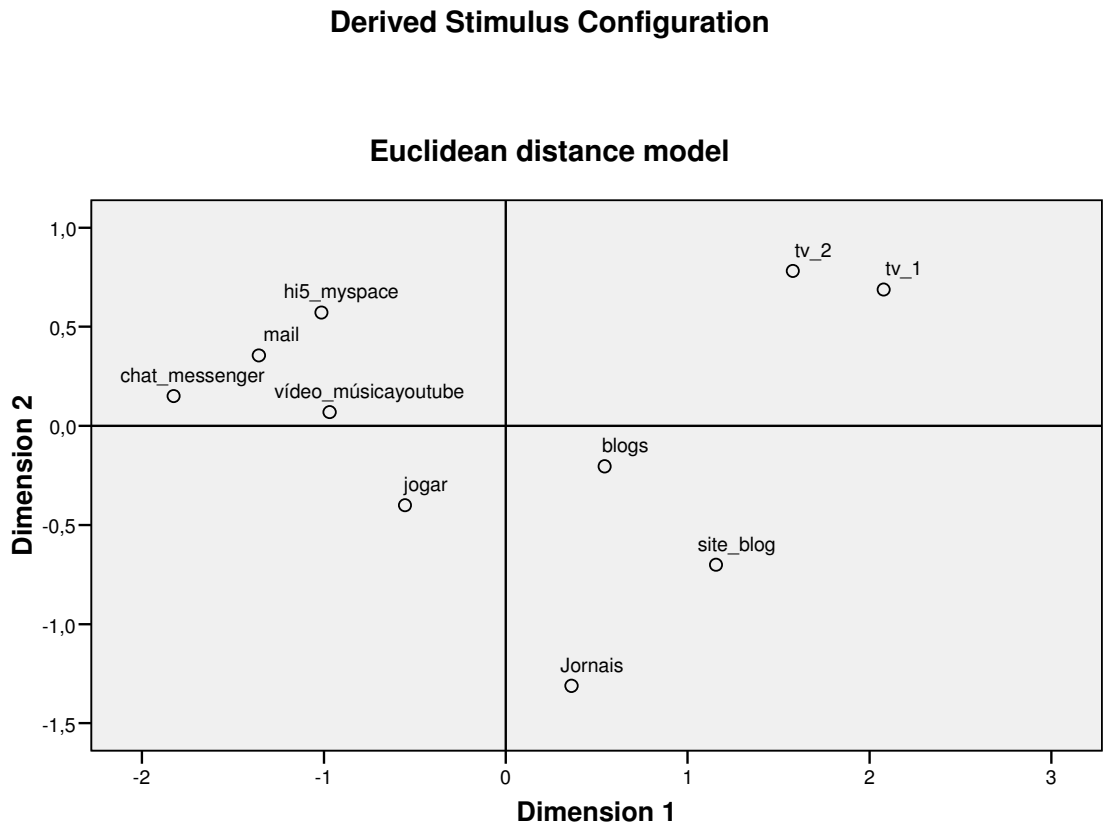
The respondents were asked to rate their preferences for the following set of activities:

TV 1	Watching TV generalist channels
TV 2	Watching TV thematic channels
Youtube	Listen music or watch video in youtube
hi5_myspace	Online communities as hi5 or myspace
mail	Sending/receiving mail
chat_messenger	Using chat or messenger
jogar	Playing games
blogs	Reading blogs
Site_blog	Building a site or writing in a blog
Jornais	Reading newspapers

MDS analysis at the aggregate level was applied to build a joint spacial map of TV and internet activities. A direct approach was used, with a preference rating based on the frequency of each activity. The data was processed with the ALSCAL program, available in SPSS. Interpretability was the key criteria in the decision about the number of dimensions. RSQ was used as an index of fit and a stress value was computed.

Results

MDS was applied and resulted in a joint representation of the TV and internet activities. The diagram shows TV and internet activities represented in the same space but they don't mix with each other. A group of internet activities aggregates very closely chat, messenger, mail, hi5 and youtube. In another quadrant we can see another set of internet activities that includes reading blogs, reading newspapers, building sites and writing in blogs. Both these two groups of internet activities show in opposition to TV. Finally, a single activity, internet games is placed near all the other internet activities and also, as expected, far from the two TV activities.



Stress = 0,06047 RSQ = 0,98163

The values of the activities in the previous dimensions are as follows:

Stimulus number	Stimulus name	Meaning	Dimension 1	Dimension 2
1	jornais	Reading newspapers	-1.3112	0.3615
2	blogs	Reading blogs	-0.2043	0.5439
3	site_blo	Building a site or writing in a blog	-0.7008	1.2563
4	mail	Sending/receiving mail	0.3555	-1.3574
5	chat_mes	Using chat or messenger	0.1505	-1.8260
6	jogar	Playing games	-0.4004	-0.5541
7	video_mus	Listen music or watch video in youtube	0.0692	-0.9681
8	hi5_mysp	Online communities as hi5 or myspace	0.5722	-1.0131
9	tv_1	Watching TV generalist channels	0.6877	2.0781
10	tv_2	Watching TV thematic channels	0.7817	1.5789

The analyis of the previous table and the corresponding MDS solution shows that tv_1 and tv_2, the TV related activities, get the highest score in Dimension 1, the horizontal dimension in the MDS diagram. By opposition, the lowest score in Dimension 1 belongs to a set of internet activities including chat, mail, hi5 and youtube. This set of internet activities with the lowest scores on Dimension 1 seems to relate directly with personal communication or, more widely, with forms of self-expression. So, it seems appropriate to **label Dimension 1 as Impersonal Dimension**.

Self-expression in obvious in hi5, but probably also in youtube as musical preferences are also a form of personal expression and as youtube music and videos are often seen in public. Looking at the other internet activities seems logic that they have a medium score in this dimension, as it is not so obvious that they have such a strong relation with self-expression but self-expression is still present. Of course it is possible to argue that building a site is a form of self-expression, but also it is reasonable to think that web site building is mainly a technical challenge that provide little space for creativity and expression except for those members of the audience with very high technical skills.

Activities with a positive value in Dimension 2 are activities that show a low effort. That includes the tv_1 and tv_2, the activities related with TV, and also a set of easy to learn or otherwise

non-effort internet activities: mail, hi5, youtube and chat. On the contrary, a low value in Dimension 2 is shared by the variables jornais, site_blog, jogar and blog, meaning reading newspapers, building sites, writing in blogs, playing games and reading blogs. These activities tend to represent some sort of effort, whether it can be a simple effort of attention to read, an effort against the complexity of building a web site or an effort of learning the rules of a game. With this reasoning, seems appropriate to **label Dimension 2 as a Non-Effort Dimension** being this the vertical dimension in the MDS diagram.

The TV activities are placed in the upper right quadrant of this joint internet/TV space. So, they represent extreme values of an Impersonal Dimension and an Non-Effort Dimension of this communication space. This is the place of TV and there is no internet activity in that neighborhood.

Discussion

The results of this research provide an explanation of how internet activities and TV relate with each other in the mind of the audience. The two dimensions found, non-effort and impersonality, may provide a basis to understand the difference between the two media. The two dimensions can, eventually, show gaps in the joint TV/internet space and provide guidance to find new opportunities and develop new activities.

Internet shows as a wider experience that TV can not fulfill because of his different nature. When compared with the internet, TV seems to be very limited in the variety of experiences that can provide. However, it still is a powerfull medium with an huge acceptance and can remain very powerful in part probably because of the low involvement that requires from the audience. For the time being, TV still has a space that is not being much disputed: good image quality, good news coverage, thematic channels, a large stock of available production, an easy shared experience at dinner time and, finally, the possibility of listen to it while walking and doing things at home.

The internet is not offering many of the advantages of TV. However the audiences look also for specific contents, personalization, live people and opportunities of growth. The set of internet activities now available provides all of these and is constantly growing. Multitask is a reality and many will be simultaneously in the internet and watching TV, of course with a lower involvement. The merger of the two media, TV and internet, is a pending reality. In the meantime, the old media, TV, is loosing quota for the new medium, the internet.