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## Webcast Football talk and the performance of ‘Super-Liveliness’

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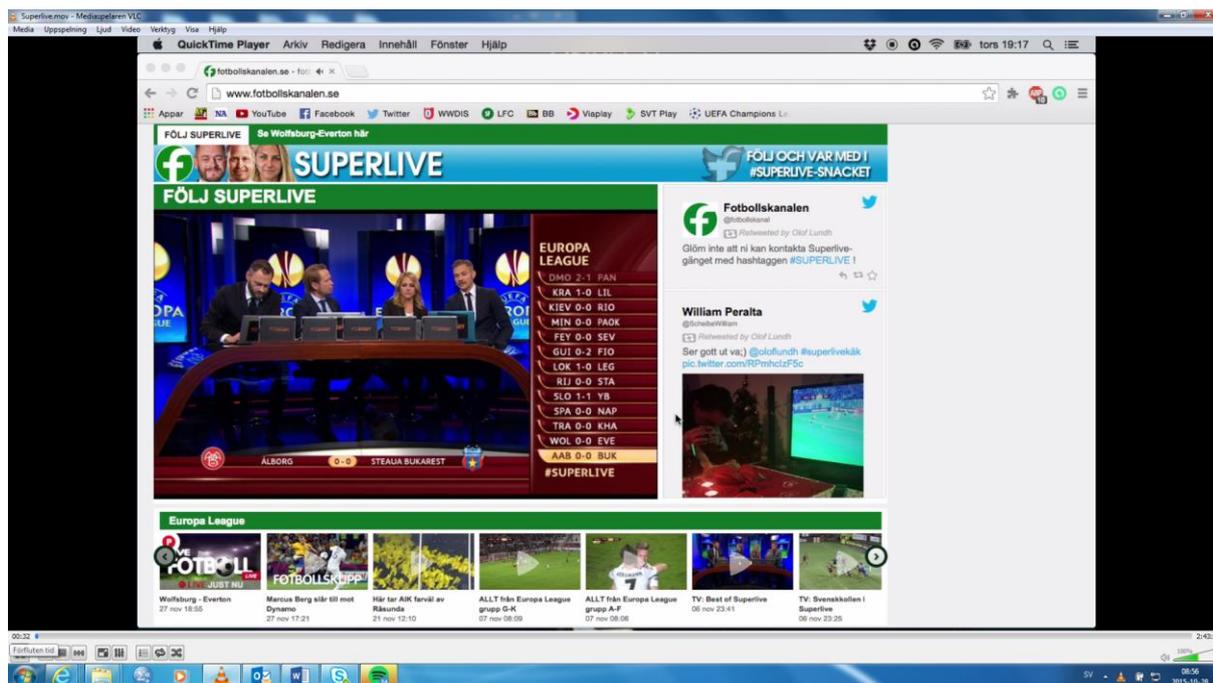
### Introduction and background

That television no longer is restricted to being broadcast but can be distributed through the internet and be received on pcs, tablets and mobile phones – in what some scholars depict as the “post-broadcast era” (Turner and Tay, 2009) – has undoubtedly altered the conditions for television production, and pushed broadcasters to reconsider how to make use of the communicative affordances that comes with this development (Ekström, Eriksson and Kroon, 2013). A crucial issue for producers is to adopt to a situation where receiving television is integrated in a complex use of screens and mobile media, not least the use of different social media. In such a competitive situation, the key challenge is how to integrate the web technology and use its interactive potential in order to produce programming that can attract audiences.

Broadcasters have been struggling with this since the mid-1990s’ (Cristian, 2012) and a part of the response to this challenge is to produce so called multi-platform events in which the broadcasters via the web create platforms for diverse forms of audience participation (Ytreberg, 2009). Producers have also started to think more carefully about their programmes also as second screen experiences and further progressed the web’s interational affordances, and among other things made live interaction between viewers and producers and programme participants possible (Lauersen and Sandvik, 2014). Another part of the answer – which is what this paper relates to – is that broadcasters produce television exclusively for the web and try out new forms for audience address, forms that are adopted to the web’s interactive affordances and the particular context of reception that comes from the use of mobile media.

This study is closely linked to the strand of research investigating how talk is designed in order to engage audiences, often referred to as the Media Talk Approach (Hutchby, 2006; Tolson, 2006; Lorenzo-Dus, 2009). A crucial starting-point for this research is a central aspect of broadcasting raised by Scannell (1996), the concept of *communicative ethos*. It starts from a simple observation that broadcast communication is certainly a voluntary activity, so it must be organized in ways that give people a reason to pay attention to it. Generally broadcast talk is thus organized with the recipients in mind; they are so to say ‘thought into’ the communicative activities. Scannell (1996; see also Scannell and Cardiff, 1991) advanced these thoughts through studying the early days of BBC radio. This was a time when the producers had to discover how to reach the audiences and through experiments they learned that a more conversational style of address, one that was adopted to peoples’ everyday life, appeared as more personal, spontaneous and relaxed, had much better potential to reach audiences and create ‘sociable occasions’.

Many professional television producers are now in a similar situation as the early radio producers. They are now reshaping television content and exploring new web-based – and ‘sociable’ – communicative modes of address (cf. Kroon, 2014); i.e. to produce webcast television content accustomed to the web’s interactive affordances and the context of multiple screens. In this paper I examine an example of such programming. The show is called *Superlive* and is produced by Swedish Channel 4 Broadcasting Group but distributed through their web-platform *Fotbollskanalen.se* (see Figure 1) on Thursday nights from 7.00 to 11.30 pm.



**Figure 1:** A print screen of *Fotbollskanalen.se*. The main window shows the four participants in the studio and the results from the ongoing Europa League games. To the right is a window showing Tweets from viewers and programme participants. Below are links to different football related video-clips.

*Superlive* shows clips with goal-scoring, goal-chances and other interesting events from the ongoing games in UEFA Europa League and these are commented and discussed by the four participants (a host, two football commentators/experts and one invited guest, normally an active player) in the studio. What makes *Superlive* an interesting case is that it is ‘aired’ while two Europa League games (one at 7.00 and one at 9.00 pm) is broadcast live on the broadcasting group’s sports-channel *TV4Sport*, and the four participants are also involved in this latter production. They appear with shorter talks (often 3 to 4 minutes) just before the game or in half-time-breaks. They then make comments about the live game, but also other ongoing matches. These *TV4Sport*-appearances are also shown on the web so the audience of *Superlive* can actually see these transitions from web-TV to traditional TV, and the shifts back again.

Although *Superlive* is produced by the same broadcasters, the ways the participants interact and relate to the web-users is distinctly different to their TV-performance. In this paper I analyse these differences more in detail. For this purpose I will connect to Tolson (2006) who distinguishes between three key qualities of traditional broadcast talk that makes it ‘sociable’: *interactivity*, *performativity* and *liveliness*. The aim is to depict how the webcast talk of *Superlive* is organized in order to relate to its audience so that people can feel included in the communicative act. How is the talk organized so it can relate to the web-TV-audience? How is it designed to appear familiar and sociable in this particular context?

Crucial for the ensuing analysis is to look closer at the sequential organization of talk (Schegloff, 2007). It means that I pay careful attention to how utterances are linked together in the ongoing talk. The immediate context of each utterance is thus seen as crucial, i.e. that each utterance is an action whose relationship to preceding and subsequent utterances is stressed. In this case it is also

of great importance to look at how sequences of talk are related to the visual work. What takes place on the screen – different clips from the ongoing games – is a recurring source for the participants' contributions in the enduring dialogue. So, a main task is to see how different participants are given, or take, the opportunity to talk and what their utterance do in its immediate context.

### Analysis

*Liveliness* refers to the need for broadcasted talk to appear lively and create a sense of co-presence (Tolson, 2006:11-14). Generally, talk should be performed in a way so it looks spontaneous and conceals that it has been planned and sometimes scripted in advance. When the participants of *Superlive* appear in the traditional broadcast, the talk is spontaneous and lively in many ways, and hides the fact that it has been planned in advance (these preparations are shown in *Superlive*). Also in many other ways (camera work and how the participation framework is organized), it follows more traditional patterns of audience address.

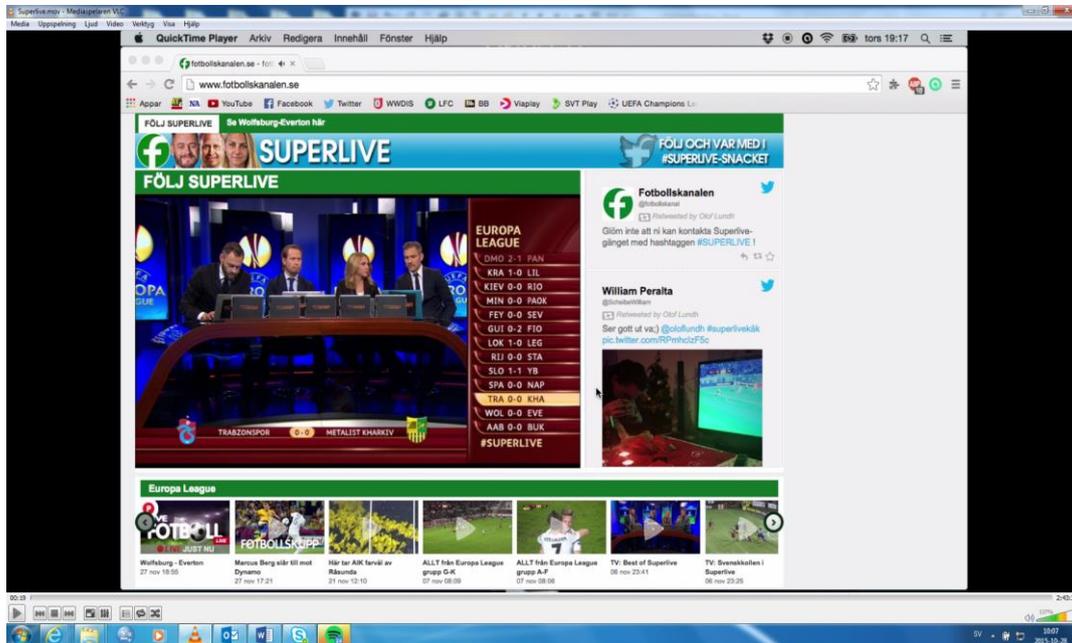
The dialogues performed in *Superlive* appear as being absolutely unscripted. They involve a complex mix of forms for audience address, and in comparison to more traditional forms, appear as unruly and not clearly oriented towards a joint communicative goal (cf. Kroon, 2014). The talk is highly characterized by the participants' seemingly very spontaneous initiatives to bring up different topics for discussions or to make sudden affective verbal outbursts. As I will illustrate through analysing one example, these dialogues appear as 'extra' or super-lively.

The sequence used to illustrate this starts when the commentator, Emelie Ölander (EÖ), includes a user-question, probably from Twitter, aimed at the guest, IFK Göteborg's goalkeeper John Alvbåge (JA) in the ongoing talk (see Example 1, Lines 1-4). Visually the inclusion of this question follows a more traditional pattern. Ölander reads the question from her laptop and then turns towards Alvbåge (Image A). There is here a shift from one camera to another and a close-up on the interviewee who is partly turned towards the other participants (Image B).

However, verbally the inclusion of the question marks a distance to traditional televised interviews. In such interviews one would expect the interviewee to get the turn when the interviewer poses a question, but here the other commentator, Olof Lundh (OL) comes in (Lines 5-6) when Ölander is about to end her turn. Lundh reacts to her statement with a comment ('now we start the tape recorder') indicating the journalistic and more public interest in this issue. Ölander underlines this curiosity by swearing ('now damn it, Line 7), which also provokes a reaction from Alvbåge (Lines 8-9). These actions have a very casual and impulsive character, and do not follow established patterns for questions and answers. Lundh's statement also suggests that although the interaction is taking place in a TV-studio and is web-cast, it is a form of talk which takes place behind-the-scenes and is aimed for a smaller group. It thus creates some sense of closeness to the web-audience, i.e. that they are taking part of something that is not available via traditional media.

Example 1 (from Superlive 27 November, 2014)

EÖ=Emelie Ölander; JA=John Alvbåge;  
JH=Jesper Hussfeldt; OL=Olof Lundh



(A)

- 1 EÖ men du när vi ändå snackar Johan Kronberg  
hey you while we're talking, Johan Kronberg
- 2 jag tycker vi ska få in den här frågan  
I think we should include this question
- 3 tidigt nu (.) vad tycker Alvbåge om att få  
early now (.) what does Alvbåge think about
- 4 in Jörgen Lennartsson som [tränare  
having Jörgen Lennartsson as [a coach
- 5 OL [hm: nu sätter vi  
[now we start the
- 6 igång bandspel[aren  
tape re[corder
- 7 EÖ [nu jä[klar JA  
[now damn it YES



(B)

8 JA [en riktigt het potatis  
[a really hot issue

9 säkert=  
for sure=

10 EÖ =det är klart det är  
=of course it is

11 JA nämen det är framför allt skönt att det  
no but above all it's good to know

12 är klart nu vem som ska träna oss  
who will train us next year

13 och man kan verkligen börja blicka framåt  
and you can really start looking ahead



(C)

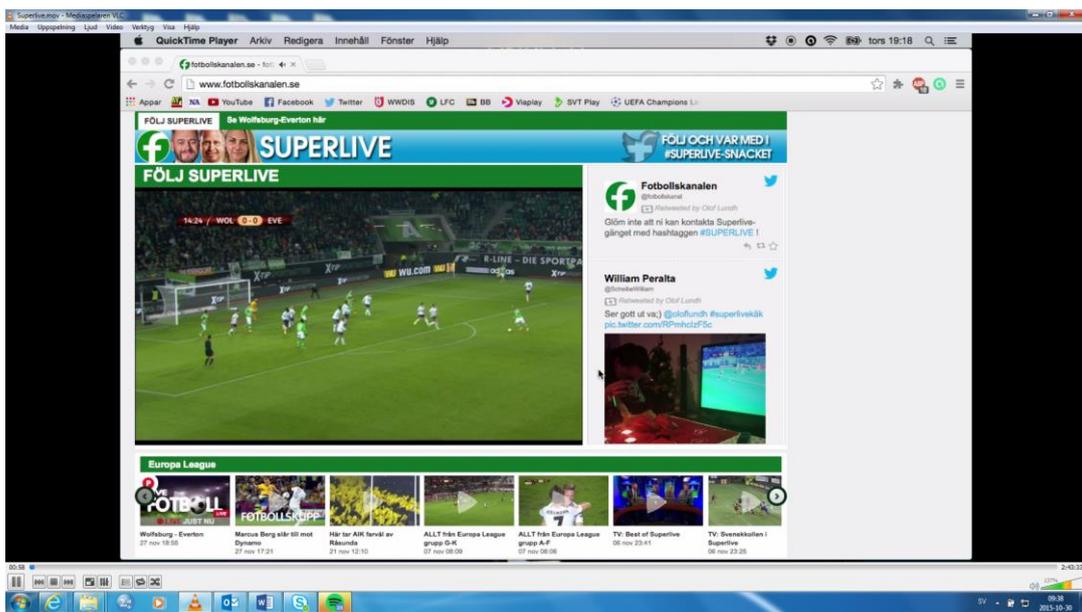
14 som spelare å anhängare till klubben  
as a player and supporter of the club

15 att nu vet vi vad som gäller å [xx  
now we know what will happen and [xx

16 JH [Jörgen har  
[Jörgen has

17 gjort nånting intressant också  
done something interesting too

18 /.../



(D)



(E)

- 18 JA /.../ han gav oss en vecka extra semester  
/.../ he gave us another week of holiday
- 19 skämt åsido så skulle vi börja träna  
but seriously we should have started training
- 20 förste december så vi får fortsätta med  
on the first of December so we will keep on
- 21 egenträningen en vecka till  
training on our own for another week
- 22 OL vilken [lobb  
what a [chip
- 23 JH [I RI[BBAN  
[HITS THE CROSSBAR
- 24 EÖ [OHOHOHOH
- 25 OL vicken [räddning  
what a [save
- 26 JH [ÅH VILKEN räddning  
[ÅH WHAT A SAVE
- 27 EÖ OIOIOIOIOI
- 28 OL Å mitt där kastar jag in lite breaking news  
and right there I'll throw in some breaking news
- 29 Prandelli har fått sparken av Galatasaray  
Prandelli has been sacked by Galatasaray

The inclusion of audience questions or comments is linked to *interactivity*. In Tolson's (2006) discussion it refers to television's employment of devices occurring in everyday face-to-face communication, devices that initiate some form of exchange. Many programmes, for instance, start with a greeting of some kind, and do so although no concrete interaction is possible. These features are used also in *Superlive*, but crucial for the organization of talk in *Superlive* is, as in the example above, that concrete interaction with the viewers is possible and frequently occurs on the show. Twitter is the main channel for audience interaction and recurrently the audience is encouraged to communicate with the participants in the studio via this channel and the hashtag #Superlive. They are also encouraged to retweet the participants' own tweets using this hashtag.

In one way these tweets could be said to function as scripts, but they are spontaneously picked up as the programme runs. Tweeters are explicitly mentioned and sometimes directly addressed, so nothing of this is concealed to the viewers. Instead, the inclusion of tweets is a way to use the web's communicative affordances so as to create a very concrete sense of co-presence (Kroon 2014); the producers and the users share the same (virtual) space. It demonstrates that users have an impact on the programme's content and that it to some extent is co-produced with users engaging in Twitter-communication.

The spontaneity of the talk also have consequences for how it relates to (or not) the visuals. The organization of visuals and talk sometimes follow more traditional patterns, but on many occasions these norms are clearly broken. In Example 1 the interviewee starts answering the question (Lines 11-15), but is interrupted by the host (Line 16) who then makes a rather long statement about the coach's qualifications. The exchange between these two goes on for 65 seconds (not reproduced in the transcript) while images from one of the ongoing games (Wolfsburg vs Everton, Image D) are shown. No one in the studio actualizes these images. There is then a shift to another game (Sparta Prague vs Napoli, Image E) and a clip containing a goal-scoring opportunity. Here, there is an abrupt shift in the talk when three of the participants (Lines 22-27) react with loud comments and excited cries linked to what happens on the screen. These outburst are actions that sometimes occur in live sport commentating which, as Marriott (2007) points out, is often done in an experiential mode. However, in sports commentating one could expect further comments after such reactions. Here, there is again a sudden shift in the conversation when Lundh (Lines 28-29) says that he wants to offer some breaking news (about a football coach being sacked). This is something that most likely originates from the web, and is instantly brought up in the ongoing talk.

So in this part of the sequence we can see that the participants can be indifferent to what goes on on the screen, but the screen can also be a source for dialogue. It can, as in this case, very suddenly be foregrounded in the dialogue, and then, also abruptly, disappear from the conversational agenda. Marriott (2007) argues that the experiential mode creates a shared here-and-now with the viewers. Her point is that television constructs its own version of the event so that the commentary is not referring to the original event but to the televised reconstruction as it can be seen on the screen. Here, however, it is not so much a question of reconstructing what is taking place on the screen. The participants sometimes foreground it, sometimes not, so the audience is in that sense not obviously connected to what is going on on the screen (the events of a football match). Rather, what they are connected to is the here-and-now that is created from the participants' lively conversations.

## Conclusions: From Liveliness to ‘Super-liveliness’

The talk in *Superlive* is characterized by the participants’ seemingly very spontaneous initiatives to bring up different topics for discussions and their sudden affective verbal outbursts. These ways of addressing the web-audience are characterized by an extreme form of liveliness, what I – making a twist of Tolson’s concept –conceive of as ‘Super-liveliness’. What I mean by this is that there are no manuscripts and hence no preparations to conceal, and that participants can make very spontaneous contributions to the on-going talk. The web-audience is involved in this feeling of super-liveliness as their tweets can be reproduced in such utterances.

This is also apparently linked to *performativity*, which concerns the fact that media talk is produced for audiences and not just between the participants involved in the particular conversation, which in turn is also reflected by how the talk is organized (Tolson, 2006). In many ways, it is clear that the talk in *Superlive* is performed for an audience, but it is distanced from the institutionalized talk occurring in traditional television airings. Instead, the talk performed in *Superlive* shares many characteristics with very casual talk between friends. This includes use of very informal language. There are very sudden topic shifts, often related to what the participants spot on the web or clips shown on the screen. In many ways the participants of *Superlive* is imitating what (potentially) is the behaviour of the web-audience; they are orienting to an idea of what the recipients’ context of involvement in the show looks like. It is a context in which the audience is involved in complex media use, utilising different screens simultaneously and constantly interacting with friends (in real life and/or via social media), but also with the programme’s participants. It is a form for audience address that aims at creating a shared (virtual) room with its audience, and this room has some resemblance with other communities or chat-rooms one finds on the web.

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