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Measuring Social Media's Relationship with Local Television Ratings

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Abstract

This paper discusses the growing importance of social media for local television stations; the ways social media positively impacts local news consumption and demonstrates how social can effectively drive both brand allegiance and local TV news viewing.

Smith Geiger's analysis, captures and quantifies how social media engagement influences local television news ratings. Specifically, the research shows how social media activities across a competitive peer index drawn from multiple markets, correlates with television ratings data during the test period.

Trends in Local News

Social media usage has become a near universal activity among consumers and the use of social media by local TV broadcasters has increased dramatically, becoming a key component of a broadcaster's marketing initiatives. Local stations continue to invest in social media as a core marketing strategy, devoting station resources and capital spending. As strategies and tactics continue to evolve, significant questions remain regarding which approaches are most effective and deliver meaningful ROI.

The wealth and nature of social media data presents a significant opportunity for broadcasters to precisely determine the validity, scope and impact that social media efforts are having on their on-air audience. Ascertaining the cross-platform impact of social on local news consumption and the iterative impact of these platforms reinforcing each other, has proved to be somewhat elusive. This analysis addresses those core challenges.

Competitive Market Indexes

Until recently, the tools required in telling the story of how social impacts local television consumption has been rather limited. Addressing this question requires access to a precise and contextually relevant source of social media data alongside a robust TV measurement system. Delivering on this promise demands a set of social media metrics enabling comparisons between the performance of different and distinct local television broadcast brands across each of their assets, including on-air talent.

Share Rocket, Inc., has engineered a social media ratings platform designed to accurately and contextually measure the impact that social media engagement creates for local television brands.

Share Rocket measures all social media activity in a defined market. A key element of the platform's methodology focuses on measuring a station's entire owned social footprint by collecting and analyzing data for the station's primary brand, all active sub-brands such as weather, sports, traffic, etc., as well as all active on-air talent, who are actively promoting the station via popular social platforms. Collecting data for every station in a defined market utilizing this methodology, provides researchers new and unique insights to benchmark and analyze the impact of social media in a local TV market.

In partnership with Rentrak, an industry leader in TV audience measurement, and analysis conducted by Smith Geiger, this study aggregates market-level social performance data and then correlates those results alongside traditional local broadcast television ratings.

The Study

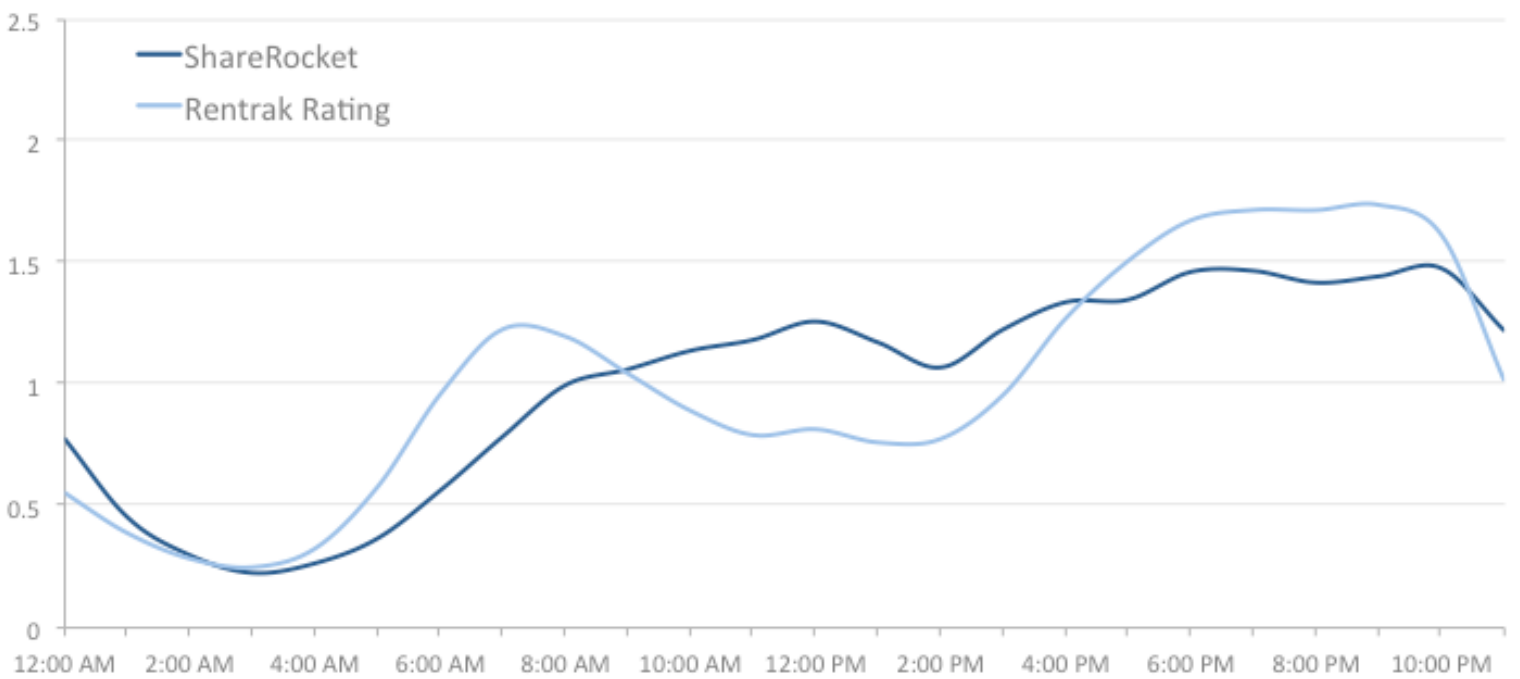
Smith Geiger analyzed quarter hour television ratings data from Rentrak, and Share Rocket's proprietary social media ratings data from January 1st through January 21st 2015. The two data sets were merged and normalized by Smith Geiger analysts in order to assess the relationships between social media engagement metrics and local television ratings over the course of the day. The results are definitive, eye opening, and groundbreaking.

Results are outlined below:

All TV Markets Correlation

ShareRocket And Rentrak Ratings – All Markets

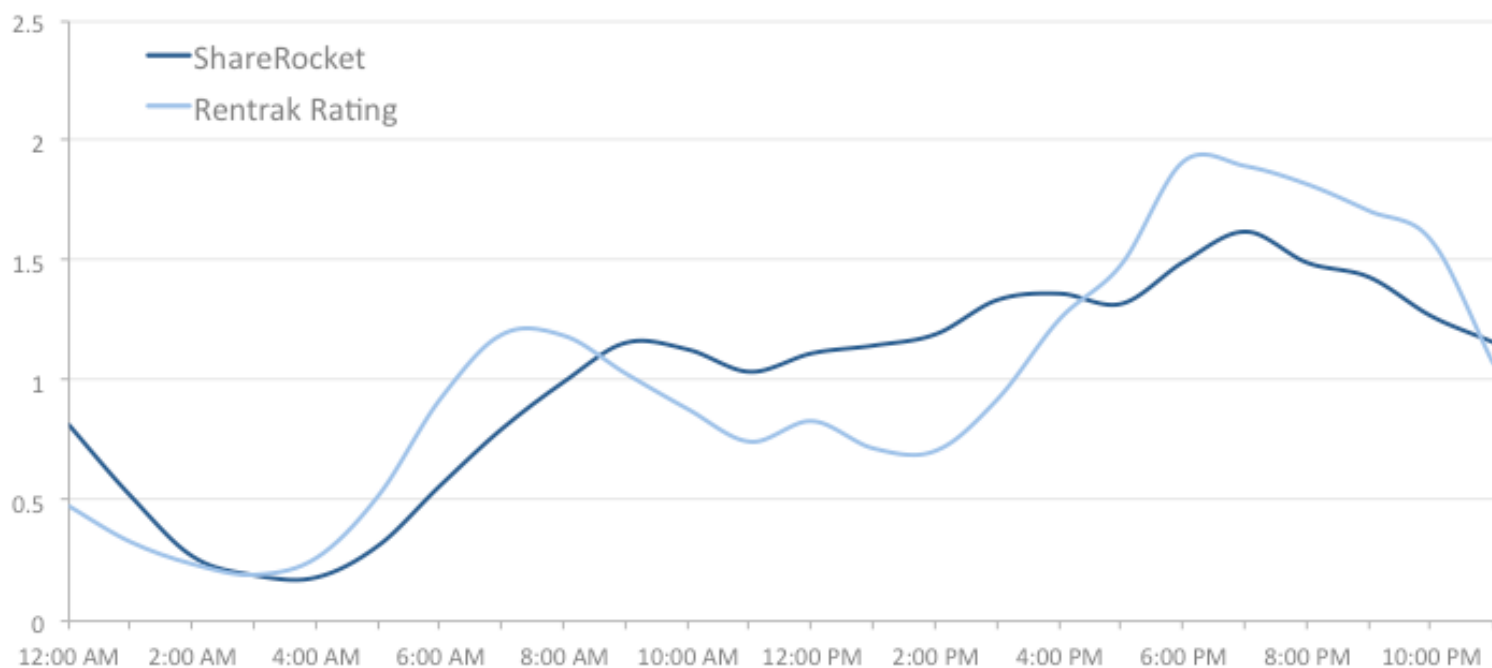
.84 Correlation



Atlanta TV Market Correlation

ShareRocket And Rentrak Ratings – Atlanta

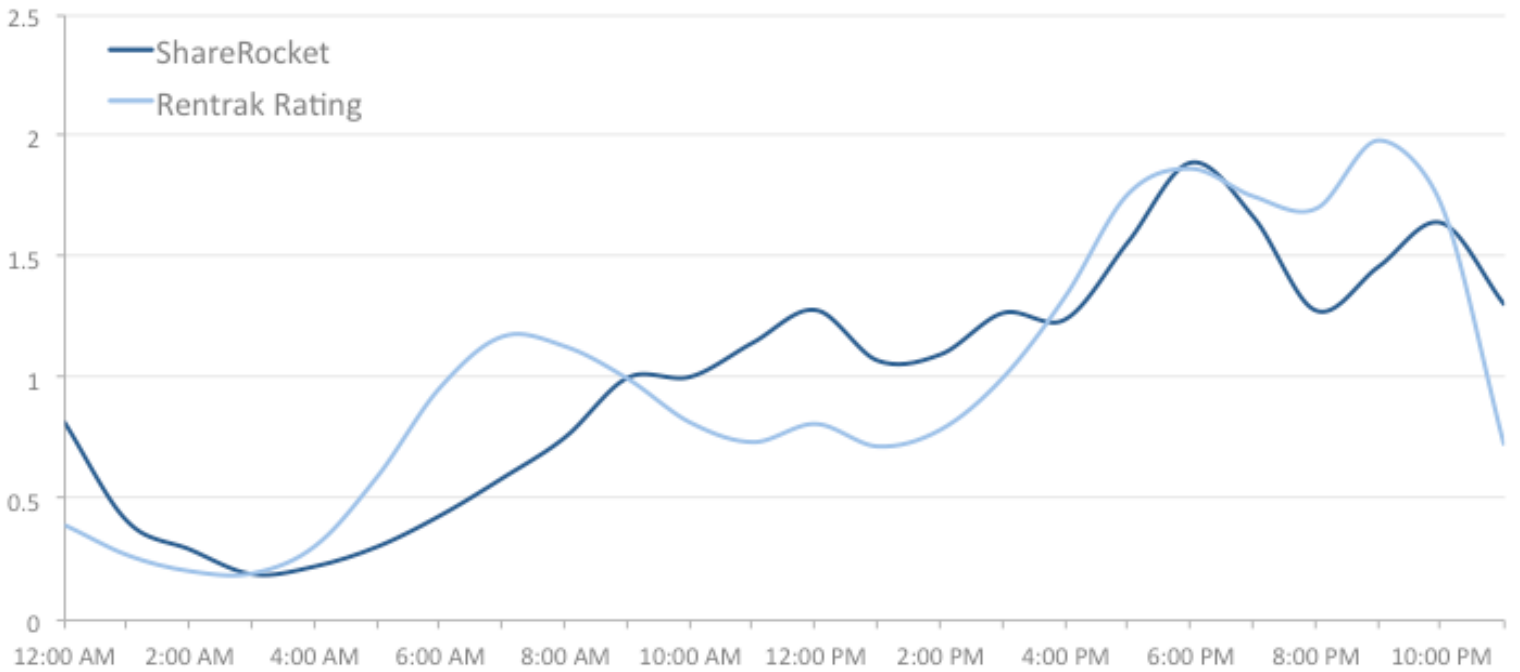
.84 Correlation



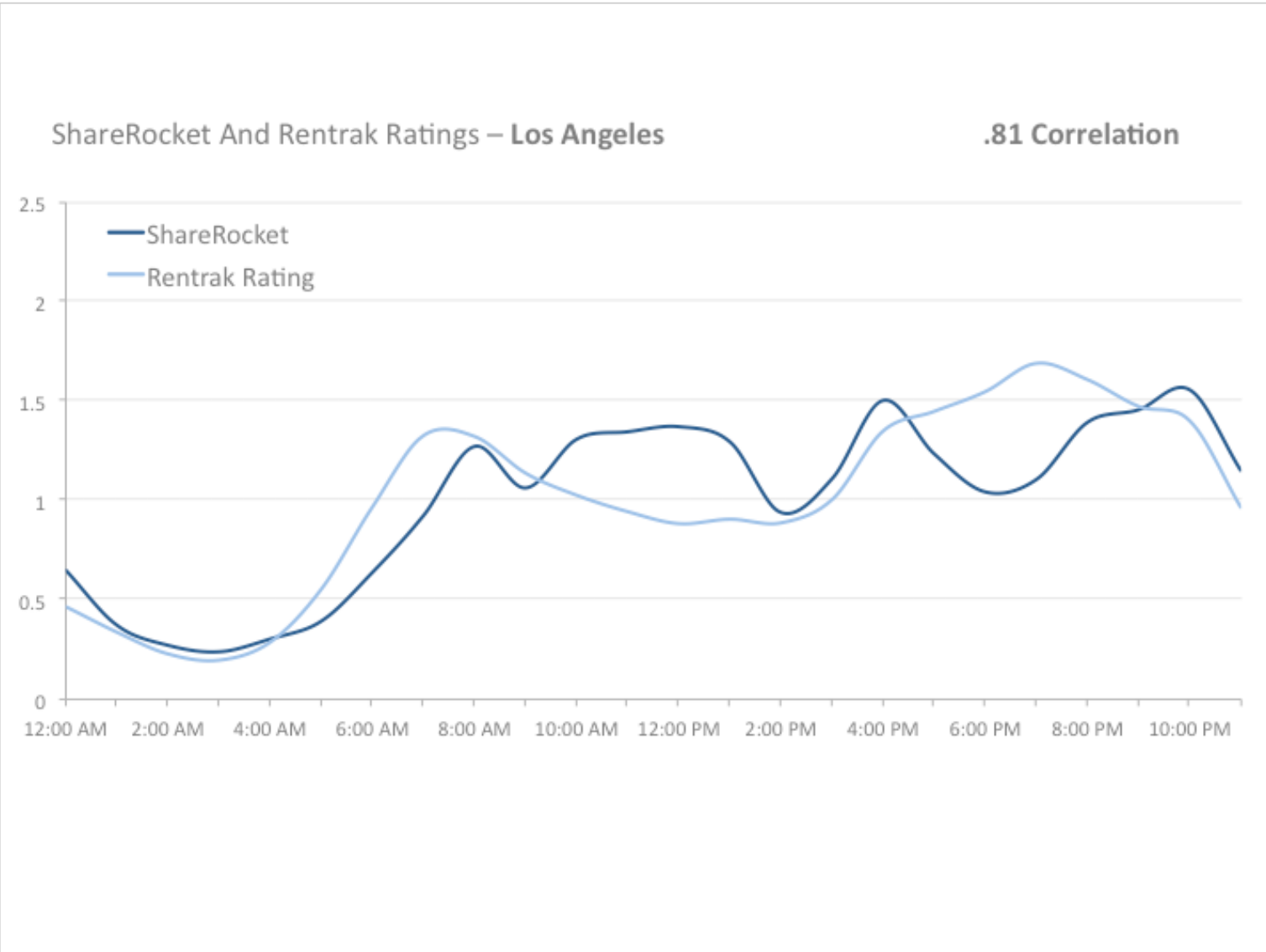
Chicago TV Market Correlation

ShareRocket And Rentrak Ratings – Chicago

.80 Correlation



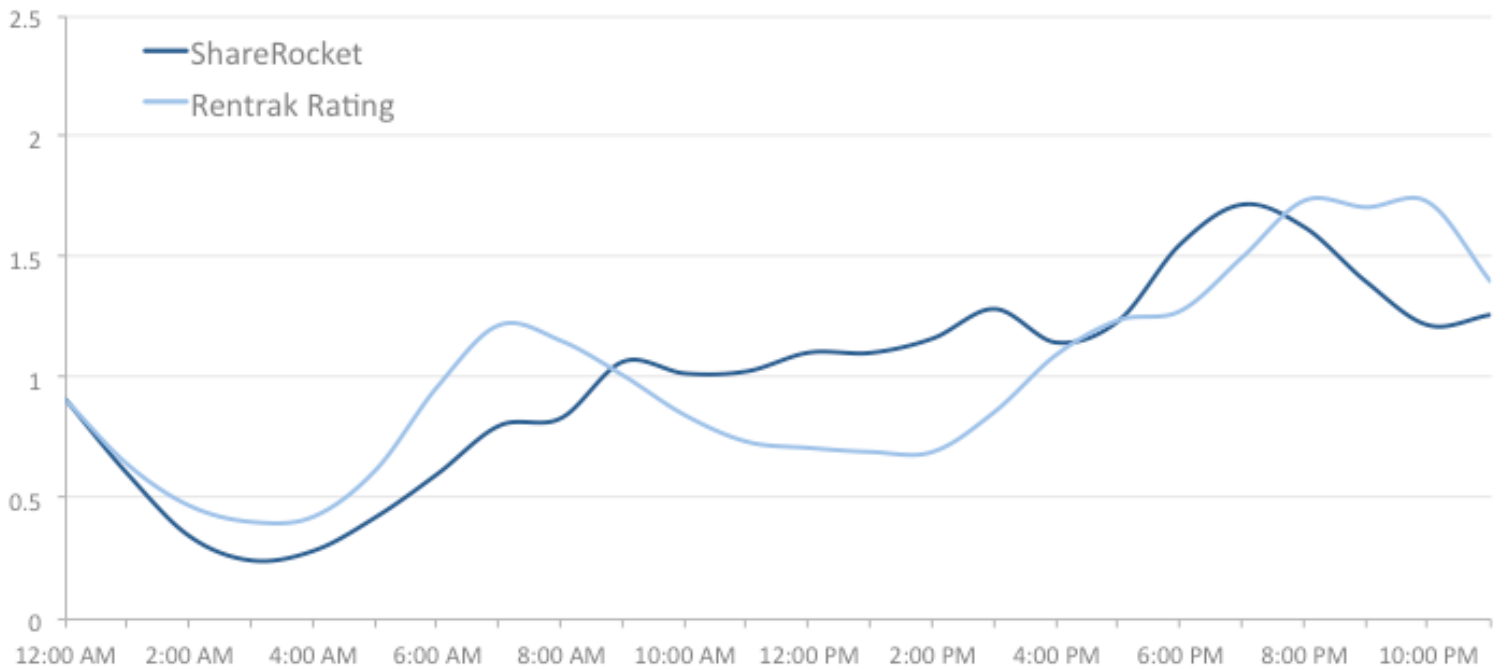
Los Angeles TV Market Correlation



New York TV Market Correlation

ShareRocket And Rentrak Ratings – New York

.76 Correlation



Key Observations

Smith Geiger analysts identified distinct and consistent patterns where social engagement metrics and TV ratings are performing hand-in-hand.

Below are the key findings:

- 1) Share Rocket's social media data consistently correlates very strongly to Rentrak TV ratings.
- 2). There are clear and repeated observations in the data suggesting an interactive reinforcement process with social driving TV and TV driving social.
- 3). This "push and pull" relationship between TV audiences and social media activity adjusts throughout the day, with morning TV driving social activity later in the day, and daytime social activity impacting television viewership in the early evening, into the late news time period.

Conclusions

The social media market data collected by Share Rocket correlates with Rentrak ratings at percentages not normally associated with disparate data sets. This suggests a very strong relationship between social engagement and positive audience behaviors for broadcasters. Social activity by local audiences appears to follow TV ratings in all markets in the morning, then by early afternoon social ratings start to precede the TV ratings, peaking in the evening.

Taken together, this represents a highly consistent and impactful relationship between social media audiences and television viewing audiences.