



Factors Affecting Viewer's Television Preferences: A Review

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Abstract

The aim of the article is to provide more insight into the relations between individual viewers differences and televisions type program preferences. The literature on media choice typically posits various affective and/or cognitive states as determinative of audiences behavior. Channel and program choice is typically embedded in the routines of day-to-day life of the viewers. Many socio-demographic and psychological factors may influence audiences behavior and their television preferences. Viewers age, gender needs, moods, motivations, personality, sensation seeking trait can be important determinants of media choice and different type of programs. Sociological and psychological approach to media choice helps us appreciate what motivates individuals to use media and how these factors affecting what viewers want to watch.

Keywords: *Television preferences, Socio-demographic and Psychological factors, Viewers.*

Introduction

Today viewers can choose between many different TV type channels (national/internationals, thematic-news, music, sport, cinema, cultural) and many different TV type programs including topics like society, political affairs, economy, foreign countries, travels, nature, history, art and culture, popular science or health and medicine. In many case this situation can rise dilemmas for individuals viewers which programs choose if many of these are equally interested in and preferred among television audiences.

Television as medium plays many roles for people. First of all, television is the main source of regular information on current affairs which is obtained foremost through news programs. It is also used to varying degrees as a source of practical information like the weather report and in some cases road traffic news or stay abreast of local events on regional and local channels. Various types of programs imparting general knowledge and can arouse curiosity of the viewers. For a large number of people, entertainment is one of the essential role of television.

Numerous programs from different categories like reality television, sports programs, music shows, talk shows, serials, soap operas, sitcoms, films, game shows aim to fulfill this role. Some of these programs provide the viewers an escape from daily routine. Television also is very often company especially for older people, housewives or those who live alone.

People watch television programs in different ways. Some of them are addictive viewers. They leave the television switched on permanently. Often, these viewers are housewives, those who are retired or work part-time and those who live alone and have a lower level of education. In some cases, young people also fall into this category. Selective viewers make clear choices in favor of specific programs. This group of viewers may also select specific channels or types of channels. They also frequently limit the overall amount of time they spend watching television. Individuals included in the "selective" viewer groups tend to watch "quality" television channels with more "intellectual" content.

The selective viewers would appear to be a minority among television audiences.

Standard viewers is much larger groups, in particular in terms of time spent watching television, and these participants have well-established viewing habits. They have a set of regular, favorite programs which can be informative in nature or essentially entertaining and fun, but are in any event a core part of the television schedule.

Channel-hopping viewers have a less well-established routine in terms of the other shows they watch: they are less attached to any specific channel(s), tend to channel hop much more, are less faithful to regular programs and take advantage of the diversity of broadcasts on offer according to their mood at any given time [1, p. 16-18].

Socio-Demographic Factors and Television Viewers Preferences

Socio-demographic variables as age or gender influence on people's television programs preferences. Mares et al. discovered that young people preferred films with dark, violent, scary, and sad content [2]. Particularly horror films were popular among younger persons [3]. In contrast, several studies suggest that older adults often prefer less disturbing programs [4,5,6]. For example, Gauntlett and Hill wrote that the preferred programs of older viewers in England tended to be "pleasant" with little violence or sexuality [5]. Mares et al. found also that older adults are interested in watching films with cheerful, uplifting, or heartwarming content [2].

Older adults are more watching television to pay attention to news on topics such as business, politics, social issue, and foreign affairs. In contrary, lifestyles topics, entertainment and celebrities news is the only topic followed by a majority of younger people and a minority of older people [7,8].

Older generations are more likely to get news from television. Young Adults age 18-29 are equally as likely to get news from TV as from their cell phones through web-based media. Age also correlates to humor in television. Younger persons are more likely to say that they watched films to laugh, feel excited, and alleviate boredom [2]. Conversely, older persons are less likely

than young persons to report having watched a video for "fun" motives.

The differences in viewing preferences are consistent with gender stereotypes. Men more likely to prefer programs that are action oriented such as animated sitcoms, sports, erotic and women more likely to prefer reality TV programs, night-time soaps, and situation comedies, romance and family films [9,10]. Nabi et al. reported that men were more entertained by reality-based programming than were women [11,12]. Greene and Krmar, in their study of exposure to media violence, found that respondents' sex predicts exposure to specific shows and programs, such as violent programs [13].

Zillmann and Brayant noted that males are far more likely to prefer programs with violent content when angered than women are [14]. Generally, females responded much less favorably to media violence than males did. Bagdasarov et al. founded that female viewers scored higher on the voyeurism scale and reported less viewing of animated satire, but more viewing of reality TV programs, night-time soaps, and situation comedies [15].

Women and men do differ in their attentiveness to different news topics. Women are more likely than men to report following news on schools and education, health and medicine, lifestyle topics, and entertainment and celebrities. Men are more likely to follow foreign or international news and sports news [16].

Psychological Factors and Television Viewers Preferences

Studies on this area concentrate on relations between psychological variables and television's viewers preferences. The results of a number of studies support the hypothesis that motivational personality traits are linked to viewers preferences. Researchers have shown, for example, that sex-oriented people are attracted to programs with sexual themes [17], religious people watch religious programs and curious people like to watch the news [18].

Some research suggests that a person's choice of television shows or programs relates to his or her identity [19], while

other studies suggest that what people choose to watch can influence how they behave [20].

Psychological studies on people preferences for specific television programs are usually conducted using the five factor model, suggested by Costa and McCrae. Costa and McCrae propose the following personality traits: extraversion, neuroticism, conscientiousness, agreeableness and openness to experience. Extraversion is connected with a high level of energy, audacity and sociability. Neuroticism means experiencing anxiety, being unable to control one's emotional states, lowered mood or low self-esteem. Agreeableness characterizes people who are polite, kind to others and subjected to others. Conscientiousness characterizes people who are punctual, persistent and responsible. Openness to experience is connected with novelty seeking, intellectual needs, high culture of thinking and a sense of humour [21].

Studies conducted by Chausson using the five factor model, indicate that openness to experience correlates with preferring comedies and fantasy films [22]. Openness to experience also fosters the preference of news programs, with a lower interest in such programs as soap operas [23].

Studies conducted by Finn indicate that high extraversion does not foster watching TV or listening to the radio [24]. In-depth research on the dependence between extraversion and preferences regarding television programmes was conducted by Kraykaamp and van Ejick, on a representative Dutch sample. These studies show that results on the extraversion scale do not differentiate people on the basis of their preferences of news programmes or other ones in the mass media (e.g. cultural, erotic or soap operas) [23].

Agreeable people like watch talk shows and soap operas, but they avoid programmes containing a high dose of stimulation or even sensation. They also prefer conventional and predictable programs [23]. High neuroticism correlates with preferring cartoons, music videos and soap operas [25].

Low neuroticism, on the other hand, is connected with preferring sports events and survival shows [26]. People who are emotionally stable do not like watching soap operas or erotic shows [23].

Interesting research concerning the above personality traits were carried out by Landers and Lounsbury. The results of their studies indicate that people with high agreeableness, conscientiousness and extraversion do not like using the Internet and prefer television [27]. High results concerning conscientiousness correlate with preferring sports programs while low results are connected with watching animated films [26].

The above results indicate that personality traits play an important role in the preference of programmes in the mass media. Studies on preferences for specific media are usually conducted using the three factor model, suggested by Eysenck. Eysenck proposes the following personality traits: extraversion, neuroticism and psychoticism.

Extraversion is characterized by being outgoing, talkative, high on positive affect (feeling good), and in need of external stimulation. According to Eysenck's arousal theory of extraversion, there is an optimal level of cortical arousal, and performance deteriorates as one becomes more or less aroused than this optimal level.

Neuroticism is characterized by high levels of negative affect such as depression and anxiety. Neuroticism, according to Eysenck's theory, is based on activation thresholds in the sympathetic nervous system or visceral brain. Psychoticism is associated not only with the liability to have a psychotic episode (or break with reality), but also with aggression. Psychotic behavior is rooted in the characteristics of tough mindedness, non-conformity, inconsideration, recklessness, hostility, anger and impulsiveness [28].

In particular, the Psychoticism dimension has been found to predict TV program type preferences. Weaver discovered that persons scoring high on Psychoticism preferred to dislike comedy and preferring graphically violent films [29].

Zuckerman and Little discovered a positive correlation between Psychoticism and interest in morbid and sexual events presented in television [30]. Gunter found that individuals scoring high on Neuroticism found scenes of violence to be particularly disturbing, whilst individuals scoring high on Psychoticism observed harmful violence as less violent and more humorous [31]. In the study conducted by Weaver Neuroticism correlated positively with preference for seeking news – information in television and negatively with preference for comedy [29]. Zuckerman and Little found a positive correlation for females between Extraversion and curiosity about morbid events [30].

Information presented in the news programmes may sometimes cause fear or even terror among viewers. However, for some people such information may be a source of positive stimulation. These people are sensation seekers. The sensation seeking trait is defined by Zuckerman as: “seeking of varied, novel, complex, and intense sensations and experiences, and the willingness to take physical, social, legal, and financial risks for the sake of such experience” [32]. This trait can be partitioned into four dimensions: thrill and adventure seeking (TAS), experience seeking (ES), disinhibition (Dis), boredom susceptibility (BS), and total sensation seeking (total SSS).

Earlier studies indicate that sensation seekers prefer violent media [13, 33] or watching horror films [34]. Rowland et al., found that high Sensation Seekers utilized television to enhance stimulus complexity and intensity, whilst low sensation seekers reported that they watched television in situations in which there were few distractions [35]. Tamborini and Stiff found that individuals watching a horror movie reported higher than average Sensation Seeking scores, and that the film was enjoyed more by younger people [3]. People with a high level of sensation seeking also prefer watching contact sports [36, 9].

The above studies do not allow us to determine without ambiguity the possible occurrence and type of dependencies between the sensation seeking trait and

television content preferences. Television programs preferences by viewers may be connected not only with cognitive curiosity or thrill-seeking individuals, but may also have a preventive function-seeking of TV information may also be a form of coping.

Coping has a long tradition in psychology. It is defined as: “the cognitive, behavioural efforts to manage particular external and/or internal demands that are appraised as taxing or exceeding resources of the person” [37]. Source literature usually distinguishes two forms of coping: problem-solving strategies and emotion-focused strategies [38, 39, 40, 41]. Schwarzer and Taubert, on the other hand, distinguish the following forms of coping: reactive coping, anticipatory coping, proactive coping and preventive coping [42,43]. While reactive and anticipatory forms of coping are firmly grounded in literature, preventive and proactive coping represent new ideas in the field of psychology of stress [44].

Proactive coping encompasses autonomous and independent setting of goals which constitute a challenge, and their consistent realization. Preventive coping, on the other hand, is defined as taking present efforts in order to minimize future stress. While proactive coping is challenge-oriented, preventive coping is directed towards eliminating threats [42].

Recent studies concerning dependencies between stress and coping indicate, for instance, Andreson et al. found that women under stress more often search for game and variety shows, whereas men under stress prefer more action and violent programs [45]. Mares and Cantor, on the other hand, showed that people who are lonely and unhappy search for programs with characters similar to them, rather than to people who are happy and socially integrated [46]. Studies on adolescents indicate that approaching coping is connected with searching for sports and horror films and avoidance coping is linked to preferring crime films [47].

Conclusion

Television is the most popular medium among viewers. They have many possibility of choice between different TV channels and different TV programs. People watch

television in different ways. Some of them watch TV all day, the others selective only most favorite programs. Many research concluded that audiences preferences is determined by socio-demographic and

psychological factors. Peoples choose TV programs according with one's own curiosity, mood, motivational personality traits, or demographic characteristic like age or gender.

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