

How do viewers select the TV programs that they watch?

tells Atul Phadnis, Chief Executive, What's-On-India Media in this write-up...

As more and more channels become available in our market, the question to ask is how do viewers select programs that they finally watch? We have been doing a lot of studies and analysis on this matter and the results are fascinating! I have tried to summarize a few of the key findings in this article.

Before we discuss how viewers exercise choice while watching TV, I need to introduce two terms here that are becoming very critical to broadcasters Appointment Viewing and Unplanned Viewing.

Appointment Viewing: This occurs when a viewer knows what he/she wants to watch. That viewer then lands on the channel at the precise start time of the program. The steps that viewers follow in this respect are:-

Step1 : Viewers switches on TV set.

Step2 : Viewer goes to the channel where he/she has an appointment.

Step3 : Viewer starts watching the

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Unplanned Viewing: This occurs when a viewer switches on the TV without knowing which programs he/she will watch. In this case, the viewer gets into a search-&-find mode till a good program has been found. The steps that viewers follow when they don't have a pre-determined destination channel are:-

Step1 : Viewer switches on TV set.

Step2 : Viewer starts search for 'something nice to watch'.

Step3 : Viewer finds 'something nice to watch'.

Step4 : Viewer begins to watch that 'something nice to watch' show.

Over the last few years its very clear that viewers are increasingly moving from Appointment Viewing TV habits to Unplanned Viewing. The reason for that is dramatic increase in number of channels, shifting daily lifestyles for metro viewers as well as expansion in diversity of programming options available.

The latest estimate for Unplanned Viewing is a whopping 70% of all viewing occasions. This means that only 30% of occasional viewers have an appointment with a specific program. This is shocking. It clearly means that millions of viewers need an aid to help search and find Television programs.

Our studies have been in these areas specifically:- How do viewers search and find TV shows that match their tastes and moods? How is this phenomenon changing with increase in channels? Is new technology helping?



Yesteryears : Appointment Viewing

Clearly there was a point in time when TV was watched with predictable regularity. In the 90s, Ramayan on Sunday mornings or Buniyaad or Nukkad would have definite viewer appointments. However, in the mid/late 90s the proportion of Appointment Viewing started depleting on account of increase in the number of TV channels.

TV Ratings for prime time shows on Hindi Entertainment channels started falling. In fact I remember how in the late 90s the top program on Zee TV, the then number 1 Hindi satellite channel, would be in single digits vis-a-vis the heady days of Ramayan and Mahabharat where ratings would be 10-12 times of that!

Today : Unplanned Viewing

As the number of channels increase one can argue that the key anchor shows in viewers' lives start to blur. It becomes impossible to remember which show comes when. More channels also make viewers less loyal to a particular set of

shows. Viewers become restless, fidgety and explore more. There is in any case no cost to move on to the next show. All it takes is a click on the TV Remote. Presented with a greater diversity of content choice viewers also become individualistic in their tastes and start having greater articulation of their now sharpening likes and dislikes.

Structured EPG Searches Helping Unplanned Viewing

Searching-And-Finding TV shows in recent times has a new paradigm. Viewers in Digital Homes (set-top-box aided) have a new way of finding the 'something-nice-to-watch' - the Electronic Program Guide or the EPG. Viewers in our market exhibit either structured or unstructured searches for TV shows. The EPG clearly falls into a structured search type.

Unstructured TV Searches During Unplanned Viewing Sessions

Channel surfing (zap...zap...zap...) is a bid to finding something interesting is clearly the most prevalent unstructured search mechanism. Going to certain 'favorite' channels is another form of unstructured TV search.

What's interesting as a finding is that Indian viewers are not hardwired in the way they will search for TV shows. The same viewer who does a meticulous structured EPG search, taking a lot of time to search for the right program, on say a Monday evening could be in a vegetative state on Friday night and do an unstructured random search by just zapping channels.

Launching India's First TV Guidance Channel

To help viewers locate all the action on TV at any point of time in the day, we are launching India's first TV Guide channel **What's-On-India**. The **What's-On-India**

channel can be also be termed as an EPG Channel due to scroll at the bottom that will flash constantly the program listings for various other channels. Even Analog viewers will be able to see an EPG via this broadcast channel!

This type of TV Guide channel is extremely popular in other markets like the US and Europe as it constantly tells the viewers what programs are running on other channels as well as information the specials programs today. Our channel will be broadcast on INSAT-2E and will be FTA. The channel has tested well in various consumer tests conducted over the last one year. We have also got very good reactions and encouragement from the market. With this we hope to address the viewer's search-and-find issues to a large extent.