In Pursuit of the Nomadic Viewer

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Introduction

> I don't think people actually sit down and watch TV anymore. They just have it on, and whatever gets their attention, they stick to it.
>
> *Focus group quotation*

Television is a medium of the future, with seemingly endless outreach possibilities as new interactive capabilities are introduced throughout the technological world. Viewers face increasing choices on the information superhighway; yet, the process of how they watch television has not been thoroughly studied. Do viewers really "view" television, or do they use it as background noise or a "babysitter" for their children? Do they scan it occasionally, or instead use it for security when no one is at home? The television viewer of the present is neither understood nor studied in the context of the variety of multiple activities which generally accompany typical viewers' experience.

Advertisers lament the overwhelming commercial "clutter" which pervades the airwaves, as numerous advertisements, "infomercials", and mini-series type messages compete for viewers' attention (Flint, 1991). They realize that many things in the home also compete for their audience's attention.

In this article, the authors report on in-depth interviews with major advertising agencies concerning the realities of viewer behavior. Though the agency executives were familiar with the situational clutter which viewers experience in their own homes, they felt that the effects of such informational and activity saturation are still under-researched.

Representatives from various agencies consistently mentioned their concern that advertising is often available in the context of multiple activities. Consumers are likely to be doing other things, such as playing with their children, eating their meals or reading the newspaper, while watching TV. Agencies are concerned that their ads must not only "cut through the clutter" of other programming, but also cut through the clutter at home, as viewers' attention becomes divided.

As a result of those questions, our goal in the study reported here was to investigate the process of using one advertising medium,

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television, in the context of various other possible behaviors and distractions. People do other things while they are watching television; they often deliberately combine viewing behavior with other things they want to accomplish. Our approach is based on the fundamental concept of polychronic time use, which simply assumes that people tend to combine several activities within the same amount of clock time (Kaufman *et al.*, 1991).

Background to the Problem

As a popular and ever-growing medium, television remains the center of numerous controversies, such as its contribution to, or destruction of, learning and thinking abilities. In addition, it is difficult to determine whether people's habits, preferences, and problems with television have accurately been measured (Weimer, 1992). Advertisers spend billions of dollars on commercials, yet have reaped decreasing effectiveness and a decline in viewers' recall (Trachtenberg, 1988). Traditional research methods can be questioned regarding their ability to capture the realities of television viewing and technology's impact on viewer habits. We argue that a major part of that reality involves the basic concept of polychronic time use.

Polychronic Time Use

Polychronic time use simply means multiple simultaneous activities; that is, people combine some activities with other activities during the same block of time. Numerous examples are found in everyday life. People read while they eat, listen to the radio while they drive, and often do other things, such as visit with their family, while watching television.

Thus, the viewer's environment is likely to be filled with many types of clutter while television programming is available to be seen and heard. Meals are being prepared, children are being helped with their homework, and chores are being done, just as a few examples. Thus, when time is used polychronically, it is questionable whether the individual can actually be thought of as viewing the television with full attention. Instead, viewers' attention and energies are likely to be divided among the activities, depending on the demands placed by each activity. It is this complex picture which must be investigated in assessing viewer awareness and recall, rather than channel selection data recorded during certain times of day, artificially abstracted away from the dynamics of the home.

Traditional Television Viewing Research

Over the last several years, standard research services such as those by Nielsen have placed mechanical devices such as "peoplemeters" in consumers' homes to assess when the television presumably is being viewed (McClellan, 1992). Nielsen reports estimate that people watch television for almost seven hours a day (Trachtenberg, 1988). Yet, given the substantial decline in viewer recall, the question must be asked whether they are really watching, whether the television is just "on", or whether other things are competing for viewers' attention. If the television is simply providing background noise, or accompanies other activities, it is possible that "viewers" may actually be "listeners" or "scanners", with selective perception actually taking place. It is questionable whether such persons are able to cognitively process advertising or program content.

Basically, monitoring devices simply record whether the television is on at a certain time of day. It is unclear whether televisions which are turned on to play the VCR or to use video games are also recorded as measures of viewership. In those cases, the television is only being used as a monitor, rather than as a

receiver. Thus, reports of viewership at certain times of day may actually be misleading, if they include television use without actual reception of programming.

Consumers frequently report that television is often viewed in combination with other activities, such as eating or reading (Kaufman *et al.,* 1991). In addition, such viewers frequently leave the viewing area in the pursuit of other activities, such as doing laundry or cleaning the house, which necessarily creates time "away" from the immediate sight or sound of the television. Such behavior patterns raise the concern that devices which monitor whether the television is on or off miss much of the variance in actual viewer attention potential, which is information of possible value in planning advertising strategies. Thus, the basic question of interest is not whether the television is on or off but, instead, whether the consumer is actually in the same room with the television and, if so, are they mentally tuned in to the message?

Contrasting studies, which have tracked television viewing, have found that several factors mediate the consumer's opportunity to view ads. For instance, consumers have been found to hold very strong attitudes toward television advertising, whether considering it to be a useful learning tool, a pleasurable entertainment, or an annoying distraction (Alwitt and Prabhaker, 1992). People like advertisements, and have very clear preferences regarding their assessment of good ads versus those which are irritating or trivial.

In addition, remote controllers play a major role in television and VCR use. What is viewed, however, and whether channels are switched to avoid commercials or fast-forwarded through prerecorded materials, is often in the control of one particular family individual (Abernethy and Rotfeld, 1991; Alfstad, 1991).

In summary, there are several related issues which advertisers must address in understanding the realities of television viewing:

(1) Is the television turned on or not; is it used for video games or for VCR use?

(2) If the television itself is receiving programming, is the advertising being viewed?

(3) Is the advertising viewed as intended, or modified, such as fast-forwarding the ads?

(4) Is the viewer paying attention, scanning, or completely tuned out?

(5) Does the time of day match the viewers' needs (e.g. viewing recorded pizza ads during breakfast)?

The Impact of Technology

In general, technology has made the television viewer more difficult to attract. Viewers have considerably more control over their viewing, and are capable of "grazing" over several programs at the same time (Benson, 1988), "zapping" commercials (i.e. switching channels) through voice-activated technology (Colford, 1993), shifting viewing time to accommodate their own schedules, and watching several programs on the same screen, possibly even combined with playing a video game on one of those screens.

The use of such techniques is widespread. For instance, an R. D. Percy and Company study in the New York area reports this staggering statistic:

> the average household zaps every 3 minutes and 42 seconds; households with remote controls zap once every 3 minutes and 26 seconds; households with no remote control zap every 5 minutes and 15 seconds.

The remote channel changer has made terms like *zapping, scanning, channel surfing,* and *grazing* buzzwords for advertisers (Heeter and Greenberg, 1985; Nakra, 1991; Pahwa, 1990; Stout and Burda, 1989). Though

advertising viewing time depends strongly on ad content variables, these effects are partially mediated by emotions and attitudes toward ads (Olney *et al.*, 1991). However, when zapping is chosen, the consumer may never even interact with ad content. Cronin and Menelly (1992) report that nine out of ten commercials were not evaluated for content before they were zapped. Instead, more viewers zapped to avoid commercials altogether.

Several agencies mentioned the technique of roadblocking as a solution to these problems. Roadblocking means to put the same commercial on different channels at the same time so that someone who is channel scanning will still see the commercial (Pahwa, 1990). The impact of roadblocking, from an advertising budget perspective, is that advertising dollars are more concentrated at one time – i.e. there are fewer long-term promotions. Another solution to zapping, scanning, and grazing is to do something visually interesting, as it is the visual image which separates good and bad advertising.

Such new consumer viewing habits naturally raise the question about whether consumers process incoming television information differently when they are capable of physically modifying the ways in which they receive such information, whether viewed later in the day, whether programmes are partially blocked out or fast-forwarded, whether video only with no sound is used, or whether a programme is viewed as part of a split-screen television. Stout and Burda (1989) report that zipping (fast-forwarding while viewing prerecorded programming) does interfere with the viewer's ability to process the information presented in the ads. For instance, brand and product recall are significantly higher when commercials are viewed at normal speed – that is, the consumer has basically *changed* the information provided by the advertiser, and that modified information is processed and recalled in a different way.

Potential Advertising Strategies

Researchers have recommended several potential alternatives to combat commercial avoidance and audience erosion (Kaplan, 1985; Nakra, 1991). Strategies such as developing involving, creative, and exciting ads were reported by all eight agencies interviewed by the authors. The length of commercials is also thought to bear an important relationship; for example, some agency executives seem to favor short bursts of information which resist zapping. However, considerable disagreement can be found regarding how such consumer viewing technologies really affect viewer selection, attention and retention. Until substantial understanding and valid measurement is generated, developing and recommending strategies is difficult to incorporate into planning and buying processes for television advertising (Lewin, 1988).

Studying the Nomadic Viewer

Using the idea of polychronic time use, the authors suggest that there are several ways that viewers can "wander", or act as nomads, during time when the television can be viewed. First, viewers can wander across the channels, as they zap through parts of programming on several stations. Next, viewers can mentally wander, as they take on other activities or thoughts. Finally, viewers can physically wander from room to room, leaving the television during part of viewing time. Thus, there are several ways that these types of nomadic viewers can be considered, as outlined below:

(1) *Competing programming – the "channel nomads"*: Viewers of the 1990s often wander from channel to channel, in search of programming which holds their

interest. Besides channel surfing and zapping behaviors, there are other, perhaps less expected, ways that viewers can watch several programs at the same time. Through their research, the authors have become aware that many people watch multiple televisions on different channels. Our prior photographic and interview research has found that it is not uncommon to have two televisions in the same room. Each television may represent the opportunity to watch two or more channels.

(2) *Televisions and other activities – the "mental nomads"*: In this case, time use involves doing several things, one or two of which may involve watching the television. Here, the advertiser is challenged to cut through the clutter of other activities – for example, dinner preparation, watching children, telephone conversation, and so forth.

(3) *Televisions and the home – the "physical nomads"*: In this case, not only are people attending to several things, they are also moving about the household living unit, picking up pieces of television and other inputs in their wanderings.

Add to all three of these areas the idea of physically changing what is viewed (e.g. fast-forwarding), and the problem that advertisers face in cutting the clutter may become immense. We report here on a multi-method study which was designed to trace the complex nature of such polychronic activities which appear to characterize television viewing for many consumers.

Methodology

Since television viewing is a misunderstood consumer activity, the study was designed to gather consumer data in three consecutive phases: preliminary advertising agency interviews, observation, and a combination of focus groups and projective techniques. The findings of each phase are considered next.

Phase One: Advertising Agency Interviews

Interviews were conducted at eight advertising agencies located in Philadelphia, Chicago and Los Angeles, from September 1992 to February 1993. The interviews were held with principals in each agency who were familiar with all aspects of agency operations including client relations, creative design, research and production. Each interview lasted about an hour and a half. The agencies included both large and small shops, and agency accounts ranged from local retail stores to US advertising for large multinational conglomerates. The purpose of the interviews was to determine how advertising addressed the issues of time, time usage and time perceptions by consumers.

The agencies, overall, reported a major concern being a change in the environment in which television advertising is viewed. Moreover, they felt that advertising education profiled the consumer and viewer of ten years ago, rather than today's contemporary time-pressured consumer and "nomadic" viewer. Indeed, many studies in advertising and communications assume the cognitive viewer, who is processing incoming information selectively, choosing visual versus verbal information, based on preference and involvement. Yet these agencies were concerned that today's technology creates viewers who may control their television environment to the extent that commercial advertising is either modified or is not viewed at all. They raised several key questions which would be useful in developing future advertising strategies.

Key Question: Are the Target Consumers Available?

Viewing studies generally make the assumption that one or more television sets are on in the home. It does not automatically follow, however, that the target audience is able to see or hear the television and its programming. Thus, the advertiser should consider both the visual and audio availability of "viewers". Prior research on time and technology in the home has led us to study homes and their organization (Kaufman and Lane, 1994). It has been found that in many cases when people say that the televisions are on, the location of those televisions in the homes make viewing impossible and hearing unlikely. The televisions may indeed be on; however, the television may simply represent "company" or "noise" in the home, with little attention paid to actual content.

Key Question: Is there Access to the Ads?

Assuming that the television is on, and that the target is able to see or hear the show, the advertisers asked whether the viewers really had access to their advertisements. An important related question considers who determines television's access to the target consumer in the household. The power may be in the hands that hold the remote control. Such an assumption suggests that advertisers should not only study what the target market wants, but also those who control the remotes to ensure access to the target.

Key Question: What Else are Consumers Doing in Front of Television?

Assuming that the television is on, that the viewer is available and that the target has access to ads, the next question asks what the target audience is actually doing while they view the television. People report doing all kinds of things during commercial breaks that would dilute or nullify the impact of any messages the advertiser was trying to send. Advertisers want to know what types of things people are doing, and how these other activities are integrated, if at all, with viewing behavior.

Phase Two: The Observational Study

In Spring 1993, an in-depth study was developed from the advertisers' comments and questions, in conjunction with two consumer analysis classes conducted at a major north-eastern university. The students were first challenged to consider the wide variety of activities which realistically accompany television viewing. The goal of this second phase was to determine the range of those activities, their potential interference with viewer comprehension, and the interaction of multiple viewers in a disguised observation exercise.

To capture the realities of television use, the students were each required to watch television with a group of family or friends for a one-hour period, recording carefully all the things which appeared on the television during that time. The observers were to remain unobtrusive, in that they were to create a plausible rationale for their writing while watching television, such as doing an assignment or writing a letter. Moreover, they were required to keep a record of everything that happened, such as television behavior (zapping, changing volume, etc.), as well as other behaviors (bathroom, snacks, reading, etc.). Finally, a record was taken of everyone present; with information such as gender and age, and relationship within the group, such as mother, friend, etc.

After the observations were completed, the student observers were to debrief their subjects, disclosing the purpose of the exercise. The participants were also asked to read over the log for accuracy, and were encouraged to add any details in a separate notation. In addition, the observers were requested to produce a rough sketch of the

layout of the room, indicating any relevant adjoining rooms or access, such as routes to kitchen or bathroom.

The observational reports confirmed many of the supposed multiple behaviors. There are indeed numerous "restless viewers" who do not sit still during television time, but instead are in constant motion and involvement with numerous other things, such as eating, laundry, child care, pet care, telephoning, and the list goes on.

Phase Three: Focus Groups and Projective Techniques

The findings in the second phase were used to develop a script for focus group administration in the third and final phase of study. Issues covered ranged from where and when people watch television, to how people "use" the television, and what else is going on when the television is used. Interaction with others, zapping, VCR use, conflicts, and interruptions were included as well. The script also discussed the recall and design of advertising. The script was refined and pretested with the students, and subsequent focus group training was conducted over several days.

Training Focus Group Moderators

The students were trained in focus group administration in several phases to ensure professional conduct and the generation of representative data. First, focus groups were discussed in class, and several techniques were presented for their effectiveness. Second, the students participated in a workshop conducted by a professional focus group administrator and trainer from a major consumer products firm in the metropolitan area. Finally, the students participated in a focus group conducted by another professional researcher, who further emphasized the students' skills and competence.

The prepared script was rehearsed in practice sessions, and the administrators were trained in warm up, problem solving, probing, and so forth. They were required to record their actual focus group on tape, for verification and content analysis.

The students were required to recruit six to eight people of varying ages to participate in a focus group. Subjects were considered to be eligible to participate providing they were regularly in contact with a television in their homes. The entire focus group sessions were taped, and the student moderators were then required to summarize their findings.

After participating in the focus groups, participants were requested to draw a diagram of the area where they usually watch television. They were asked to comment on any problems which they associated with the viewing area. They were encouraged to suggest any changes which they would make if they could. They also were asked to sketch their ideal viewing area, if they could.

The Sample

A total of 327 people participated in 52 focus groups, each administered by one of the student assistants. The average age of the participants was 32.7 years, ranging from the youngest at age 6 through the oldest at age 95. The ages were widely dispersed; for instance, 17 were aged 17 and younger, while another 17 were 65 and older. Since student-selected samples could potentially be biased towards characteristics similar to the students themselves, selection was required which gathered people of varying genders, occupations, and ages. Slightly more than half of the sample was female, with 177 women and girls participating, while 144 males completed the group. Finally, occupations varied among professionals and nonprofessionals, such as housewives,

students, salespeople, secretaries, electricians, accountants, managers and teachers.

Results

Location of Televisions

Certain rooms throughout the home tended to be frequently cited as television viewing areas, such as family room, living room, bedroom, and kitchen. What was interesting is that families have from two to seven televisions, on average, and frequently the televisions are used as "individual's" televisions to avoid conflict due to zapping and channel hopping. This paints a considerably different viewing picture than that found in traditional research, which tends to suggest that household groups are generally concentrated around one main television for the bulk of their viewing.

Another interesting finding was the tendency of television viewers who maintained multiple televisions to report that several individuals would watch their "own" sets at the same times, and then meet in common areas such as the kitchen during breaks such as the commercial blocks in between television shows. Schematic drawings indicated that considerable distance may well exist between all the viewing areas, but that generally there would be a "path" which viewers tended to traverse when making conversational contact with other household members. This trend is also thought to contribute to an atmosphere of social isolation, given that it reportedly arises because of the considerable conflict generated by disagreement about the use of the remote control.

Such a finding raises the interesting possibility that viewers who are loyal to watching a certain television program may never see the ad intended for them; instead, they may view ads on a totally different station during one of their commercial-time visits. Advertisers who place their messages based on viewer habits must seriously consider what percentage of their target audience has ever had the opportunity to view their message at all.

Using the Television: Watching, Listening, TV as Friend or Security

Many consumers plan to do other things during commercials, indicating that television viewing is considered by many to be a polychronic time-use activity. Breaks are taken at this time, and may even be scheduled. In fact, numerous activities were reportedly chosen during certain television or commercial breaks, since the viewer knew how long the activity would take, and that it would "fit" nicely in the time available. Other activities, such as playing games with children, paperwork, eating, reading, and crafts were instead chosen as activities which were compatible with television viewing, and could be done at the same time.

Certain interruptions are annoying to many, and come from various sources: pets, children, telephone, doorbell, conversations, and even zapping were mentioned. The telephone is a constant problem; many solve this by bringing a cordless telephone to the TV viewing area, or deliberately ignoring the telephone while the answering machine recorded the caller's message.

Eating and TV watching seem almost synonymous. Whether preparing food, having dinner, or just plain snacking, people do like to eat while watching TV. Many reportedly considered eating while watching television as a single activity, rather than as the pairing of two discrete activities. One respondent commented:

> I usually watch TV from my couch when I am relaxing. When I eat I turn the TV table towards the dining room so I can see the TV. Otherwise, I can see, unless I'm doing my hair from the bathroom, then I peek out.

In addition, the television was "used" by many for non–informational and non-entertainment purposes. These responses are summarized in Table I.

The Remote: Who's in Control?

Consistent with both past research and common consumer culture, the use of the remote control does appear to be gender specific. Most of the 52 focus groups verified that it is generally the dominant male in the viewing group, whether composed of family or friends, who tends to hold the power of choice. However, it is unclear whether gender is masking a more fundamental issue such as power, influence and control in the household.

As mentioned above, informal group responses to this remote "controller" consist of displeasure, conflict and, ultimately, viewing a different, isolated television. The "battle of the remote" was seen to compromise the closeness of the family in favor of the viewer having choice of programming. Responses included the following comments:

- The zapper is like a "scepter for men" – he has complete control.
- The zapper makes people very lazy.
- If they break, it is like losing part of the family.
- My God-given right to have total control of the remote control as a man.

The Zapless Ad

Viewing habits have changed owing to the information superhighway; people have at their fingertips many more channels than before, all in an instant. However, advertisers argue that they can strive toward the zap-resistant ad by making ads which are interesting, informative, creative, attention getting, etc. Common themes surfaced numerous times throughout each focus group; these include humor, cute kids or animals, sex, catchy music, information, attractive people, celebrities, and linked ads which create a "mini-series" effect.

It is important to recognize that, if an ad is in the middle of a "pod" of ads, and it is zapped, the consumer is not evaluating and rejecting that ad, but instead may be eliminating commercials in general. Advertisers have attempted to determine whether consumers pay attention to and evaluate an ad before it is zapped, or whether they automatically zap an ad once they realize that it is a commercial, with little attention to content.

The VCR as an Ad-avoidance Technology

Respondents also reported that much of their motivation for prerecording television programs stemmed from the desire to "zap" and fast-forward through the commercials. This deliberate viewing strategy was described as being done either by the viewer or by the actual technology itself. When done by the viewer, the VCR was used to eliminate commercial viewing as soon as the programming was recognized as advertising content. In many cases, the actual themes or brands represented in the ads were never viewed or recognized; instead, the viewers were looking for cues such as momentary blackouts, change of on-screen situation, change of music, announcements such as "we'll return after this message", and so forth. In terms of selective perception, the ads stand the chance of never being seen by the viewer; thus, the drive to create the entertaining, non-zappable ad may be valueless to viewers who fit this profile. They see so little of the advertising content, if any, that the creativity embedded in the ad has little power to reach their perception.

Where do people view television?
Family room, children's room, living room, bedroom, kitchen, basement, garage, den, dining room, laundry room, bathroom

How do people use the television/ Why do they turn it on?
Viewing specific programming
Listening to specific programming while doing other things
Using as an electronic baby sitter
Using as an electronic tranquilizer to unwind from the day, relaxation
Using as a form of escape from dreary lives
Using as a form of distraction while working out on exercise bike
Creating a form of security, left on while no one is home
Providing company for one's pets
Feeling as if the television is a substitute friend, seems like someone is there
Creating a source of noise or sound in an empty home
Helping in going to sleep – a sleeping pill
Playing video games
Viewing videos on VCR, recording programming on VCR

What other things are people doing while the television is on?
Preparing food, meal consumption, snacking
Playing games with children, child care
Doing paperwork, homework, reading, sorting mail, paying bills
Doing household chores, cleaning
Working on crafts, sewing, mending, laundry
Getting dressed, personal care, grooming, using bathroom
Taking scheduled breaks (time to load washer, time to get snack)
Talking on the telephone
Viewing other television programs
Visiting, conversations with family or friends
Exercising
Sleeping, dozing, relaxing
Socializing with others, personal time, having sex

Why do people leave the room while the television is on?
Answering the door or telephone
Meeting other household members during breaks
Using the bathroom
Getting something to eat, food preparation
Letting pets out, playing with pets
Taking care of children, checking on children, putting children to bed
Leaving to perform household chores, laundry, cleaning
Avoiding annoying commercials

Which interruptions interfere with television viewing?
Pets, children, telephone, doorbell, conversations, zapping,
people entering and leaving room, outside noises,
people wanting to play video games, people wanting to view another program

Which themes are preferred in commercials?
Humor, cute children, cute animals, sex, popular or catchy music,
jingles, information, attractive people, celebrities,
mini-series of ads (e.g., Taster's Choice), fast-paced action,
appeal to human emotions, oddities, short messages,
notification of sales or bargains,
recognizable characters (e.g. Energizer Bunny), novelty and uniqueness,
sports heroes, comedians, colorful ads, cartoons, suspense

Table I.
Key Issues Discussed in Focus Groups: Range of Responses

Room Layout: The Information in Schematics

An actual setting. Figure 1 illustrates the type of environmental relationships which can greatly affect the consumer's television viewing patterns. Proximity to various other competing, complementary, and substitute activities can affect what the consumer is able to do during viewing.

For instance, Figure 1 depicts the viewer's television environment as being in the basement, with a drawing table and a bar at the same location, so both work could be done and food consumed while viewing (Quinn, 1993). Access to food, however, was upstairs, completely out of range of viewing. In addition, access to the laundry facilities was through a door into another area.

An ideal setting. Figure 2 shows another consumer's version of an "ideal" television viewing environment. Notice that the sizes and relationships of all the elements have changed. The viewer, who is reclining in a sauna, is using a portable telephone and the remote control for interacting with the big screen TV/VCR combination. A huge refrigerator is depicted as within arm's reach, and a bathroom is adjacent, just behind the individual whose job it is to "fan" the viewer.

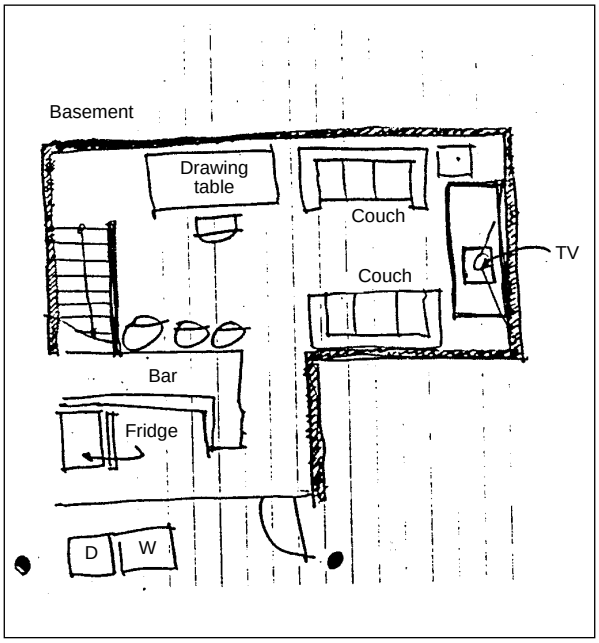

Figure 1.
Type of Environmental Relationships which can Affect Consumers' Viewing Patterns

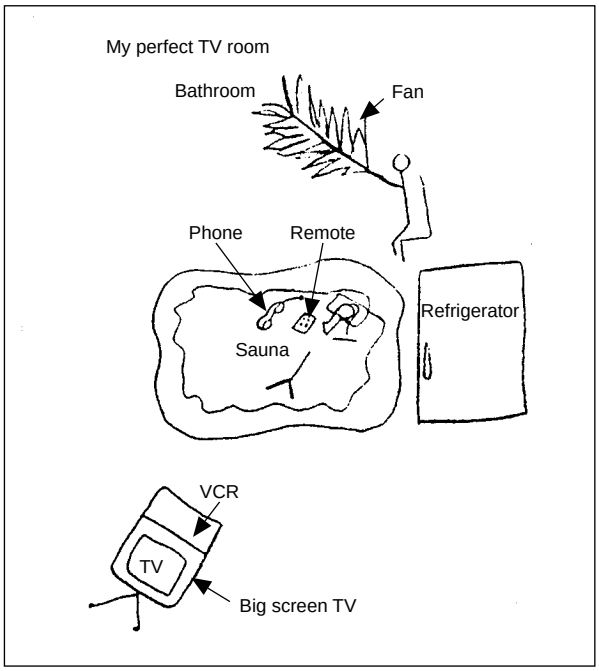

Figure 2.
Another Consumer's Version of an "Ideal" Viewing Environment

What is interesting from this drawing is that many of the items are now within reach, presumably allowing for continuous viewing without leaving the viewing area. In the "reality" drawing, access to the source of food (refrigerator), bathroom, and telephone all appear to require that the respondent cease viewing and move to the desired location. It would appear, at least for this specific respondent, that the viewer does not really want to leave the TV area, but does so out of necessity. Such needs can often be identified through schematics, and are thought to provide direction for furniture design and home layout. For instance, the manufacturers of recliner chairs have responded to this need, with models featuring built-in heaters, arm rests, writing arms, telephones, and food storage areas.

Managerial Implications and Recommendations

Further development of this study suggests the development of a psychographic inventory, which is drawn directly from the questions raised within the focus groups. Survey research can incorporate the realities of television viewing drawn from observations and focus groups. Such a presurvey study of the context of viewer behavior can add information and understanding to the complex process which surrounds television viewing in a dynamic home setting. Future research could investigate whether viewers can be divided into segments, such as the channel nomads, the mental nomads, and the physical nomads suggested in this study. Additional issues which are recommended for further study include the following:

Is There a Relationship between Zapping and Clutter?

One study reported that zapping and the amount of clutter appear to have a proportional relationship; that is, the more clutter, the more zapping. However, studies have shown that, while there is more clutter during daytime than during prime-time TV, there is less zapping in daytime, which runs counter to this proposition. One possible reason is that, during the day, people are likely to use the television polychronically for combining activities which do not require them to be sitting next to, or in front of, the television. But, in the evening, there is likely to be more zapping, since the remote control can be held by someone who is simply sitting and viewing, without attempting to do other things. It would be interesting to determine if such behaviors are related to time-of-day viewing and consumers' propensity to tolerate clutter.

Is Zapping Gender Specific?

If men zap more than women, why is this so? Many focus group respondents reported that men want to watch more than one television show at a time, while women want to stay on the same channel. One hypothesis is that men want to view television polychronically; that is, they want to view more than one show in a given time block, possibly because the programming simply does not contain enough real content. Women, on the other hand, seem to be more likely to pair all sorts of activities with TV viewing, and perhaps find it difficult to zap shows. If they are ironing, doing laundry or cleaning, for instance, and listening to the television for company, they may not be holding the remote or be actually viewing the television, sitting as if the TV were the primary activity. Another possible motivation deals with power in the household. Yet another concerns a male attitude towards immediate "action".

Are Consumers Modifying the Ads While They Are Seeing Them?

As mentioned above, consumers may be seeing very different ads from those which are intended by advertisers. Given reported tendencies to view parts of ads, to skim over ads, and to play them at faster speeds than intended, advertisers should investigate viewer comprehension and recall of ads which have been modified in these ways. What do consumers remember from ads which have been fast-forwarded? Has the message been distorted in some way? How accurate are their recollections of ads which have only been viewed in part? What triggers their reactions to skim over ad content?

The results indicate that the beginning of a segment of ads "signals" to the viewer to zap or fast-forward to avoid commercials. Advertisers should determine whether certain themes are less likely to be avoided, and

place them at the beginning of their messages. In addition, if advertising follows other commercial messages, it is important to be able to predict the viewers' reactions to the preceding ads. The appeal or annoyance of the ads preceding a particular advertisement may greatly influence whether the latter's message is viewed at all.

More Comprehensive Measurement Methods

The measurement of people's television watching behaviors is controversial. Nielsen's in-home people meter has been widely used, yet it cannot pick up many of the behaviors identified in the focus groups described in the present study. It cannot reliably tell us who is actually viewing the television, or even how the television is being used (for example, it may not distinguish between playing video games or using the VCR). It simply tells us that the television is on and is tuned to a certain channel. For instance, suppose that a viewer's VCR is recording a certain program at 8 p.m., while the viewer is absent from home. Later that evening, the viewer turns on the television, and proceeds to watch the prerecorded program using the VCR. While the viewer is watching an 8 p.m. program at another time, and only watching once, is it possible that the measuring device registers two television usages instead? Reportedly, Nielsen is considering returning to its handwritten diary as a method of capturing some of the realities of consumer TV viewing which would, at a minimum, be more reflective of the actual behaviors which take place during television viewing.

Summary

Television viewing in the 1990s is dramatically different from viewing during the early days of television. Nomadic viewers may wander across channels, into other activities, and throughout the home itself while the television is being "watched". It is possible to combine many more alternative behaviors with viewing, and consumers also are likely to have several televisions operating in their homes at the same time. Technology allows viewers to record, speed up, slow down, skip over, replay, and totally ignore commercials as they choose, providing a wealth of options which are likely to change viewer comprehension.

We argue that one useful approach to organizing these complexities is the recognition that polychronic time use characterizes a substantial portion of the viewer's behavior. Our preliminary data provide a multi-method approach for identifying the types of behaviors which are actually vying for the consumer's "share of mind". Marketing managers need to address such actual viewing behaviors, habits, and actual room arrangements in attempting to create ads which can cut through the dynamic clutter which will comprise the television viewing environment of the future.

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