

Internet Behavior among Certain Classifications of Television Users

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Introduction:

Since its inception, the Internet has created many new methods for how people communicate, receive information, and experience the world. For example, instead of writing letters, most people now write e-mails due to their efficiency and ease. The Internet provides a place for users to bypass both time and space to convey a message and perform many daily tasks. While it serves as a very intimate medium, connecting users with friends, family, and personal information, the Internet also reaches the masses and provides world news and widespread entertainment. This gives it a unique dynamic compared to television, radio, or even print newspapers which have been traditionally centered on a mass audience. As such, the Internet has quickly become a rapidly growing medium, bringing its users to a level of interactivity and multidirectional communication they can get nowhere else.

Television's steady decline in ratings and the Internet's rapid growth have caused many networks to focus on their websites and deliver high quality videos with a comparable selection online. With these new options, Internet visitors are able to watch television shows on-demand instead of during regularly scheduled programming. In addition, Web sites such as youtube.com and sidereel.com allow users to watch a wide variety of programming, often without commercial interruption. Therefore, television is finding new ways to combat the Internet's success or else become a part of it.

Purpose of Research:

While researchers continue to study the Internet and its use, only few have compared these results with traditional media use. The purpose of this research project is

to study Internet habits with different categories of television viewers based on the amount of television they watch. It will study how much television people watch, what their Internet use is, and what they do on the Internet. This topic is important because as the media evolve, so do the media habits of users. While the uses and gratifications theory has thus far been applied to previous mediums, the inception of the Internet has prompted new questions and hypotheses regarding how people use the media in their everyday lives. Researchers not only study each medium by itself, but they also compare each medium in relation to each other in order to gain insight into the entire scope of media uses and gratifications. Knowing why people who tend to watch more or less television are accessing the Internet may help advertisers understand the best way to reach the public, and it will help predict future media habits and understand media convergence more thoroughly.

Literature Review:

Historically, communications research has studied the media's effects on its audience. Though researchers are split on the exact beginnings of the uses and gratifications model, many of the consistent studies began in the 1940s, since prior experiments like the Payne Fund Studies and analyses of the War of the Worlds panic focused more on behavior than theory (Lowery & DeFleur, 1983). While most early-effects research focused on experiments more than theory, (Klapper, 1960), Cantril's 1942 study arguably first defined uses and gratifications research by studying the gratifications that attract and hold a media user to the medium that satisfies his or her social and psychological needs (Cantril, 1942). However, other researchers like Dozier

and Rice (1984) credit Wilbur Schramm for the inception of uses and gratifications research for his 1949 immediate reward and delayed reward model of media gratifications (Ruggiero, 2000).

As the television became more popular in the 1950s, researchers began to focus on how audiences used the mass media as an escape as opposed to solely for entertainment (Katz and Foulkes, 1962). As more and more researchers continued to study television in the 1960s, they shifted from traditional experiments to more functional ones (Ruggeiro, 2000). Klapper (1963) discussed the consequences of media use and how these consequences are only “functional” when they keep its social system healthy. Uses and gratifications research at this time tried to see if audiences were benefiting or suffering from media use by studying, for example, how gender, race and social class affect television viewing and parental control (Greenberg and Dominick, 1969). According to Rayburn (1996), as studies progressed, research focused more on gratifications sought rather than gratifications received. The media were seen as an important function of society, causing both problems and solutions for those who used the media to seek answers to everyday problems (Rosengren, 1974).

This theory began to branch out further in the late 1970s, studying specific needs people were using the media to gratify. Blumler (1979), for instance, concluded that the media gratify peoples’ needs from three primary origins. As technology continued to evolve in the early 80s, researchers examined audience motivations for using different media as well as the diverse uses people made of each (Ruggiero, 2000). In addition, the uses and gratifications theory began to gain strength as an accepted theoretical base – even to critics (Rubin, 1983). Bantz’s 1982 study, for example, compared television use

and favorite program type and found that people do not identify medium-specific or program-specific uses, adding to the theoretical foundations of uses and gratifications research (Bantz, 1982). Studies at the time also reevaluated previous assumptions about active audience (Ruggiero 2000). Windahl's 1981 study, for example, began focusing on the audience before the communicator, and Rubin's 1984 study concluded that audience activity is variable, not absolute (Rubin, 1984). For many researchers, not much was being discovered in relation to the uses and gratifications model around the mid-1980s on into the 1990s. Besides studies of cable subscribership, VCR use, and computer use, media in general were used in similar ways. However, new findings of Internet use have challenged some of the assumptions, procedures, and findings of the traditional uses and gratifications model (LaRose and Easton, 2004).

Since the Internet can be seen as a mass communication medium or an interpersonal communications medium, its uses and gratifications differ from traditional mediums like television or print newspapers. In addition, the lack of regulation of digital technology changes the content available for users (Finn, 1997). Internet users have a vast amount of media choices, not to mention the array of convergent media online, giving them new motivations and satisfactions (Ruggiero, 2000). The amount of interactivity provided by the Internet may give users new means of developing communication (LaRose and Eastin 2004). This new medium opens doors to new experimentation and study that have never been done before. For example, one experiment studying how college students receive news showed that users tend to watch television more and read newspapers more than those not so computer savvy (Pew Research, 1998). Another study showed that while escapism is positively correlated with

television news watching, both entertainment and escapism are positively correlated with Internet news watching. Although people tend to have similar uses and gratifications for the Internet compared with traditional media, current research is finding new avenues to apply this theory, discovering new uses and gratifications along the way.

The first research question compares how much time people spend watching television to how much time is spent using the Internet. Patterns in usage would show if television users are using the Internet in conjunction with television or instead of television.

RQ1: How often do different levels of television users utilize the Internet?

Based on the way television ratings have decreased in recent years, the current onset of the Internet shows that they could be directly related. Therefore, the following hypothesis was proposed:

H1: People who watch television minimally will use the Internet more often.

In addition to this proposition, this study also aimed to discover what certain television users accomplish by using the Internet. Thus:

RQ2: What do different levels of television users do while they are online?

Since the Internet offers so many video-watching capabilities (both streaming and downloadable), it is thought that users are more often turning to the Internet to view television-related content; specifically, entertainment. Therefore, the following hypotheses were proposed:

H2: People who watch television minimally will choose to watch videos online rather than on television.

H3: People who watch television minimally will use the Internet rather than television for entertainment.

Methodology:

This sample consisted of 208 participants who responded to either an online survey or a similar print version. 161 respondents completed it online while 47 responded via print. The sample was 35.1% male and 50.5% female, while 14.4% failed to provide their gender. Most participants ranged between 18 and 35, however, one respondent was younger than 18 and two were older than 35. Also, over 90% of this sample reported either having some college experience or receiving a Bachelor's Degree. Almost 89% of participants considered themselves to have a White/Caucasian ethnicity. Respondents were recruited using an invitation system through Facebook.com and by handing out paper surveys to undergraduate students at a southern university throughout a span of one week in November 2007.

For this study, respondents were asked to provide answers to a 15-question survey, consisting of thirteen multiple-choice questions regarding their television and Internet use and two questions that asked respondents to rank their reasons for using the Internet and television. The multiple choice questions asked how much time people spend using each medium as well as which medium they prefer for entertainment and watching videos. Other questions probed their ownership of related media items such as computer hardware and television sets. Results of this survey were processed and analyzed using SPSS (Version 11) and running data through chi-square cross tabulation

tests. Each nominal and ordinal variable was compared to related variables to answer the hypotheses.

Definitions

For this study, television viewers and Internet users were divided into categories based on the amount of time spent using each medium. Those who watch television or use the Internet zero hours per day are considered to be “minimal” users while those who use each medium more than five hours per day were considered to be “excessive users”. Those who use each medium 1-2 hours per day are considered “somewhat minimal users” while those who use each medium 3-4 hours per day are considered “somewhat excessive users.”

Results

Analyses of the chi-square test of independence showed that no significant relationship existed between the number of hours spent watching television and the number of hours online ($\chi^2(1) = .138, p > .05$). H1 predicted that people who watch television minimally will use the Internet more often. Most of the sample watched television 1-2 hours per day and Internet use was somewhat divided between 1-2 hours per day and 3-4 hours per day. As television use increased, Internet use showed no correlation; therefore, H1 was not supported.

In addition, a chi-square test of independence was calculated comparing the number of hours spent watching television and a particular preference of medium on which to watch videos. A significant interaction was found ($\chi^2(1) = .001, p < .05$).

However, this calculation merely pointed to the fact that an overwhelming percentage of the sample (79%) preferred to watch videos on a television rather than an online forum. This showed no strong relationship with any specific tier of television watchers. H2 predicted that people who watch television minimally will choose to watch videos online rather than on television. While minimal television users had no significant partiality, each category of television viewers consistently chose television videos over Internet videos. Even when comparing different categories of Internet users, similar results ensued, though not as drastically. Therefore, H2 was also not supported.

As shown in Table 1, a chi-square test of independence was calculated to compare the number of hours spent watching television and a preference of medium for entertainment. A significant interaction was found ($\chi^2(1) = .03, p < .05$). H3 predicted that people who watch television minimally will use the Internet rather than television for entertainment. This hypothesis was partially supported. While minimal television users preferred the Internet for entertainment, somewhat minimal users did not. The most common response showed that somewhat minimal television users preferred television for entertainment.

Despite the fact that these hypotheses were primarily not supported, this study provided other interesting information. The cross tabulation comparing the number of hours spent watching television and using the Internet showed that users are generally spending more time online than watching television. Almost 18% of those surveyed admitted to spending five or more hours online every day, while less than 4% watch television five or more hours per day.

Table 1

Case Processing Summary						
	Cases					
	Valid		Missing		Total	
	N	Percent	N	Percent	N	Percent
HoursTV * Entertainment	200	96.2%	8	3.8%	208	100.0%

HoursTV * Entertainment Crosstabulation			
Count			
		Entertainment	
		1	2
HoursTV	1	12	21
	2	69	47
	3	30	13
	4	5	3
Total		116	84

Chi-Square Tests			
	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	8.957 ^a	3	.030
Likelihood Ratio	8.955	3	.030
Linear-by-Linear Association	6.517	1	.011
N of Valid Cases	200		

a. 2 cells (25.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 3.36.

By comparing the number of hours spent watching television and respondents' rankings for what they prefer to do online via cross tabulation, this study found that almost 64% of the respondents used the Internet primarily or secondarily for school or work-related studies while nearly 79% of the sample admitted to using television primarily for entertainment. In addition, other relationships using a chi square test of independence proved to be significant. For example, there was a significant interaction between owning a television and preferring television for entertainment ($\chi^2(1) = .002$, $p < .05$). People who own televisions are more likely to prefer television to the Internet in regards to entertainment. There was also a significant interaction between television and computer owners' medium quality preference medium choice for entertainment ($\chi^2(1) =$

.017, $p < .05$). Those who believed their personal television set had better quality than their computer with Internet capabilities also preferred television for entertainment and not the Internet. After calculating another chi-square test of independence comparing those who own special hardware that allows them to watch television on their computers with medium quality preference, a very significant interaction was found ($\chi^2(1) = .000$, $p < .000$). As shown on Table 2, even people who own hardware to watch television on their computers prefer television for quality. A chi-square test of independence was also calculated to compare television ownership and medium preference for watching videos. A very significant interaction was found ($\chi^2(1) = .000$, $p < .05$). Those who own television sets prefer television for watching videos. However, almost 80% of those who own computers with Internet capabilities also prefer television for watching videos.

Calculating frequencies also gave some insight into this study. Ninety-six percent of the people who were surveyed owned a computer with Internet access, while only 92% of participants admitted to owning a television. Almost 89% of them owned both. Those who owned both a television and computer with Internet capabilities preferred their television for quality (68%) to their computer with Internet (32%), while 58.5% of owners felt that the Internet provided a better selection than television. However, it was fairly equal on whether quality or selection was more important to them when choosing to watch videos on their personal devices. 60.2% of the sample submitted that they watch an average of 1-2 hours of television every day, making most of the participants somewhat minimal users.

Twice as many people used the Internet between 1-2 hours per day than people who watch television 1-2 hours per day. However, over four times as many people

Table 2

Hardware *				
Crosstab				
Count				
		Quality		
		1	2	3
Hardware	1	41	21	7
	2	49	21	50
	3	1	1	9
Total		91	43	66
				200

Chi-Square Tests			
	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	32.558 ^a	4	.000
Likelihood Ratio	35.441	4	.000
Linear-by-Linear Association	24.718	1	.000
N of Valid Cases	200		

a. 2 cells (22.2%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 2.37.

admitted to using the Internet excessively than people who admitted to watching television excessively. Only one participant disclosed using the Internet minimally, while 38.2% used the Internet somewhat minimally, and 43.5% of respondents used the Internet somewhat excessively.

Discussion

Taking in the entire scope of this study, many of its results can illustrate how certain tiers of television users utilize the Internet. The most striking result was that all respondents use the Internet far greater than the television. While most television watchers were somewhat minimal users, most of the Internet users were somewhat excessive. This could mean either that the Internet offers more activities in which users can engage, or it takes longer to accomplish their uses and gratifications online than with

a television. While the study did not explore the speed of Internet connection of the respondents' computers, the more logical assumption is that users have more to do online than the television can offer.

In addition, the fact that almost 80% of all respondents preferred watching videos via the television leads to the fact that even though people considered the Internet to have a greater selection, they still preferred their television set quality. Surprisingly, though, when asked which was more important when watching a video, responses were quite evenly split between quality and selection.

Despite the Internet's variety of options, most respondents also preferred television over the Internet when it came to being entertained; however, more participants owned computers with Internet access than owned television sets. This shows that users are probably utilizing the Internet for more than just entertainment purposes. To illustrate this point, when asked to rank their primary activity on the Web, approximately 23% of respondents submitted entertainment as their number one choice, 22.6% submitted entertainment as their number two, 22.6% entered it as their number three choice, and 22.6% entered it for their number four choice.

Using these results, the uses and gratifications of the Internet are easier to see and understand. By comparing the Internet's functions with specific categories of television users, online habits such as information gathering, entertainment, social networking, etc. can be traced and followed to not only see what users are doing online but also why they are using the Internet. Techniques that study traditional mediums compared with the Internet shed light on Internet habits and trends among that medium as well. For example, in this study, while it is concluded that most people prefer television for

entertainment, they are also using the Internet somewhat for entertainment. The relationship that the Internet has with each level of television users is unique, and more uses and gratifications could be found by comparing other mediums to the Internet as well.

It seems as though with recent advancements, the Internet should be more of a competitor with television. However, this study supports the tenet that television is very much alive and thriving alongside the Internet. As an intimate and interactive medium, the Internet can be used for a wider variety of reasons than the television, from online banking to communicating with someone from across the globe. While television seems to function mainly as an entertainment source, the Internet can take advantage of its own multifaceted and versatile nature, concentrating on no specific area of expertise.

Limitations

This research contains a variety of limitations. In hindsight, the survey should have asked more probing questions than it did, such as if people ever watch television on the Internet, or what kind of Internet connections they had. Instead, this survey focused on questions related much more to television, which provided more information regarding the uses and gratifications of television than the Internet. For example, this survey asked if respondents had hardware on their computers that allowed them to watch television (i.e. TV cards).

While the sample was random, it still consisted of demographics not typical of the United States. A larger sample size could have made it more reflective of real life; therefore, another limitation is the relatively small sample size. While 208 people

responded to the survey, some of the information could not be used because it was not filled out properly or the participant failed to enter data. Therefore, some results calculations were analyzed with a sample size of less than 200. The survey could have been written more clearly to avoid these issues like the 30 respondents who failed to enter their gender. In addition, the sample included more online participants than offline. The results may have been skewed due to the fact that in order to take the survey one must have been using the Internet to find it. An equal number of printed surveys should have been present to make this study more reflective of the population.

Future Research

Future research could follow similar users' media habits over a period of time via a longitudinal panel study. This would show how people's uses and gratifications may change over the next few years and track the possible switch from television to the Internet on a small scale. As different forms on online television, such as Internet Protocol Television (IPTV), take shape and slowly diffuse into society, many previous television users could switch to the on-demand, selective features that the Internet provides.

Another area of future study could experiment not only with video watching as a source of entertainment but also how people use video watching as a source of information. One of the main functions of television is to communicate news to its audience, and as this study shows, an equal amount of users spend time online looking for information as they do being entertained.

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