

An Exploration of Video Consumption Habits

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Abstract

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore video consumption habits. The researchers wondered if viewers who engage in heavy consumption of video on demand (VOD) might see the world in a different way than others who do not engage in heavy consumption of VOD. An interview of 25 participants led to mixed responses. The theme of "procrastination" quickly emerged. Participants indicated that they consume video on television and video on demand on an equal basis, which contradicts current literature on the subject. The majority of respondents noted that they multi-task while watching traditional television or video on demand. The majority of respondents also noted that they engage in procrastination because of heavy consumption of video on demand.

Keywords: Television; Video on demand; Cultivation theory; VOD; Netflix; Hulu; YouTube

Introduction

Have you ever stayed up all night to watch an entire season of a television program via video on demand (VOD)? Netflix and other streaming services are changing the way we watch television. With endless streaming and few commercials, people can binge watch programming at their leisure. In a global poll of more 30,000 individuals, Nielson reported that 65% of respondents watch some form of VOD. However, traditional television has maintained its position as a force in consumer consumption. Has video consumption changed? Does video on demand affect our behavior and if so, how? Where does traditional television fit in to the changing dynamic in video consumption?

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to explore video consumption habits (with emphasis on live television and VOD). As part of their work, the researchers wondered if individuals alter their television viewing habits to utilize video on demand. For the purpose of this study, video on demand (VOD) was defined as a free or subscription based interactive system that allows the viewer to select content and view it at the time of his or her own choosing. Kennedy [1] noted, "Video on demand is where consumers play selected videos over their television sets, the Internet and mobile devices" (p. 25).

Theoretical Perspective

The researchers wondered if viewers who engage in heavy consumption of VOD might see the world in a different way than similar others who do not engage in heavy consumption of VOD, and so Cultivation Theory as a philosophical lens was chosen by the researchers through which to view the problem. This theory focuses on attitudes and behaviors after people watch television. This theory states, "The more a person watches television the more likely he is to be influenced by what he watches when compared to others who watch less but share similar demographic characteristics" [2].

Literature Review

VOD use is increasing across the globe. Fox [3] reported that around 28% to 33% of the population watch television shows and movies online. Kho [4] suggested that consumers of media will turn away from traditional forms, including radio and television and turn toward VOD. Ascharaya [5] noted binge viewing is on the rise.

Solsman [6] noted that a decline in prime time broadcast television ratings in the fall of 2015 may have been due to people watching content on mobile devices versus tuning in during scheduled programming on traditional televisions. Nielson reported that U.S. homes with subscription services for VOD watch less television. However, 26% reported that they pay for a VOD subscription service versus 72% who pay to watch television through a traditional connection.

Weinman [7] reported that traditional viewing is in a state of decline and VOD has overtaken prime time television. Steinberg (2012) noted, "Video on demand is going to play a major role in how people consume video going forward. Nielson indicated that the expected VOD penetration in the U.S. by 2016 was expected to be 65.9% with 45.7% of homes are expected to have video services" (p. 12). There are 250 million households worldwide who pay for streaming video services. Growth is predicted to be more than 450 million by 2022. With almost 111 million paid memberships, Netflix is the market leader, accounting for about one-third of streaming video subscriptions. In addition, the U.S. is the global leader in subscription-based VOD with 59% penetration, followed by Canada (51%) [8].

Research and Data Collection

This phenomenological qualitative study explored individuals' experiences in media consumption via live television and VOD, with emphasis placed on how and why such consumption occurs. The researchers used an interview-based method to gather information, which allowed the researchers to gain a variety of perspectives and attitudes from 25 participants from King's College. The researchers obtained from utilizing information that identified the subjects. After obtaining consent the subjects answered the following questions (if they denied consent, they were politely excused; if the participants agreed to answer the questions, it constituted as consent). Using a pen and paper method, the researchers collected the data and then transcribed it in to a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet to identify themes. The questions were as follows:

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Do you consume video programming on a traditional television, mobile device, both, or neither?

Do you consume video programming in real time or on demand?

Do you use a DVR?

Do you multi-task when you watch traditional television or video on demand?

If you consume video on demand, where do you watch?

If you consume video on demand, when do you watch?

If you consume video on demand, do you prefer to watch these shows alone or with someone?

If you consume video on demand, has doing so changed your life?

If you consume video on demand and suddenly had to stop doing so, what would you be doing instead?

To verify the research in this phenomenological study, the researchers utilized the approach outlined by Creswell and Poth in "Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches" (2017). The data was first submitted to and confirmed by another researcher who identified patterns in the research that were similar to the patterns the researchers identified. Outside readers then confirmed the data as they matched their own perceptions to participants' perceptions of video consumption. Next, the researchers noted that the experiences fit together in a logical manner and were able to apply the results of their research to shed light on video consumption habits.

Findings

Participant responses were mixed and the theme of "procrastination" quickly emerged. Participants indicated that they consume video on television and video on demand in an equal manner, which contradicts the body of literature on the topic. Respondents noted that they consumed video programming on a variety of platforms, also noting that they consumed such programming in real time and on demand about equally, with the use of a DVR also split among respondents. The majority of respondents noted that they multi-task while watching traditional television or video on demand. The majority of respondents also noted that they engage in procrastination because of heavy consumption of video on demand, indicating that their time would be best served engaged in another activity. Video on demand activity occurred mostly at home and in the early and late evening, often consuming video on demand alone.

A consistent response among respondents suggested that video on demand, as a convenient and flexible platform, leads to procrastination. Respondents indicated that there much better uses of their time than consuming VOD, but they indicated that they were consciously choosing to watch VOD despite potential consequences. Participants noted that if they missed a show on traditional television they were confident that they would be able to watch it on VOD, perhaps in a few weeks or months. Netflix and Comcast Xfinity were mentioned as VOD frontrunners, while YouTube also received several mentions. Respondents noted that comedy and science fiction films were their preferred VOD content.

In addition, the researchers noted that while participant interviews were occurring approximately half were multitasking, performing other tasks, such as looking at their mobile device, while the other half was fully engaged.

Conclusions

Some significant findings are worth mentioning. First, the idea that respondents noted that traditional television viewing is about equal in consumption to VOD contradicts the literature on the topic related to the growth of VOD. More than one participant noted they prefer to consumer traditional television over VOD. This may suggest that live television may continue to be of importance to viewers. As indicated respondents noted that comedy and science fiction films were their preferred VOD content. Continued traditional television consumption in this manner may also suggest that various programming needs, including type of program, genre, etc. are not being met on VOD. Subscription VOD providers must take note.

The majority of respondents noted that they multi-task while watching traditional television or video on demand and the researchers noted that while participant interviews were occurring approximately half were multitasking. This could suggest that some video content may not engaging at times for participants. It could also suggest that our video consumption needs and we as humans may be changing, evolving in a manner that encourages us to utilize all senses, sometimes subconsciously, to be stimulated. This may also suggest that concept of effective storytelling in video must change and adapt to remain strongly and prominently positioned in the crowded marketplace of ideas, a type of natural selection that must be addressed and explored.

The majority of respondents noted that by consuming VOD they were procrastinating. The researchers were not surprised by this, although it is worth mentioning that several subjects who were perhaps heavy consumers of VOD noted that they skipped other activities, such as sleeping, exercise, and bathing. The researchers observed that the respondents seemed amused by sharing this information.

As noted Netflix and Comcast Xfinity were mentioned as VOD frontrunners, while YouTube also received several mentions. Almost all participants noted that they had access to VOD subscriptions but did not pay for them. They indicated that these subscription services had great value but perhaps not enough value for an investment to be made on their part. The researchers found this theme to be especially interesting. Further research should be conducted to determine the relevance of pricing decisions in VOD subscription based services.

As the researchers reflected on whether or no individuals alter their television viewing habits to utilize VOD, it was determined that subjects set aside time in the evening (early and late) for VOD. In addition, respondents noted that they often consume VOD alone. The idea of isolation during consumption of VOD is a concept that is worth further exploration. Cultivation theory may suggest that heavy users of VOD may see the world in a different way than others. Specifically, if subscription VOD provides a mechanism for binge watching, and if the more an individual consumes VOD, the more likely he or she is likely to be influenced by such content versus similar others who consume less, then perceptions of the world by VOD binge watchers may be skewed.

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