

**THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN TELEVISION  
STRUCTURE AND PATTERN OF VIEWING:  
THE CASE OF THREE FOREIGN STUDENTS  
IN UNITED STATES**

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Most qualitative research look at the use of television within a family setting. Studies also have been conducted on public viewing of television. But there is hardly any research that has been done on personal viewing of television. Certain types of viewers fall into the category of lone viewers. Many college students who live alone or sharing an apartment with a friend who seldom stay at home or who does not like to watch television can be classified as lone viewers.

Research in family setting found certain rules operating in the context of family structure. This kind of research examines the subject's testimonies and behaviors surrounding rules and conditions governing the use of television within the home. Rules and conditions of control can be broken down into two characteristics: (1) formal rules established by various members of the household and (2) instances that exhibit a family member's control of programming. Formal rules include parental guidelines for viewing, encompassing times for or duration of programming and program content. Control of programming refers to the family decision-making process. The isocial rules, expectations and norms.

But, in the present study, due to the nature of persons involved, they are all lone viewers. These viewers are students. They seem to regard viewing as a personal activity. This becomes the case when all of them said that most of the time they watched TV alone. Thus the rules in operation might not be relevant. If there are regularities, these are associated not with social rules but with individual interests, social rules, expectations and norms.

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Patterns of viewing behavior for the present study refers to those ways of relating to the set and programs. Also under scrutiny are the actual viewing "styles" exhibited by each viewer in an attempt to derive conclusions as to how each viewer uses television.

Because technological development has caused the change in the nature of television, it would be essential to observe patterns of viewing in relation to the nature of the set. Technologically, within the framework of programming structure and equipment system, TV can be categorized into three types:

1. TV set with a basic public channels, that is ABC, NBC and CBS.

2. TV set with a basic cable programming and may include a movie channel.
3. TV set with a basic cable programming plus at least one movie channel, a remote control and may include a stereo hook-up.

The present study hypothesis on the patterns of viewing behavior are reflected by the technological and programming structure of the TV set. When the number of programming channels increases, we might expect more choices of programs are available. More choices mean that the decision making process of program selection tends to get more complex.

According to Robinson (1981), generally, there are three ways of program selection:

1. Viewer seek out specific programs (that means viewer refers to the TV Guide or based on memory in deciding what particular program to watch).
2. Viewer settle down for an evening or anytime he/she feels free and choose among the programs available.
3. Viewer turn on the set (at any random time) and watch whatever program is being broadcast, that is, watch "television" per se without even consciously choosing the available programs.

The two main reasons for conducting this project are:

1. both scientists and the public (persons like Les Brown whose experience is described later) need to know simply to be informed about television and to understand its use, and
2. the answers to such questions will be relevant to programmers and commercial firms as channels increase in number.

In his article, "Sojourning in the Vineyards of TV Ordinaire," Les Brown discovers his family's new viewing behavior and said:

I used to take some pride in having trained myself to watch programs rather than television. This meant tuning in just what I wanted to see and not allowing myself to get hooked on the next thing bobbing along in the programming flow. My kids were raised on that ethic, although to be honest it was often a struggle. Under the house rules, it was okay to watch programs they specifically wanted to see but not okay to flop down before the set, checking out what was on and just watch anything. This worked fairly well for all of us, until cable came down our street. Now the kids, when they are home, watch MTV, arguing that it's a program and not just television rather than programs, because with 30 channels going on at once I can't resist tapping the buttons on the coverter to see what's happening elsewhere .... (channels, July/August, 1985)

Three areas will be adopted for the present study. The first area of inquiry is to determine the relations between the technological and programming structure of TV set with the patterns of viewing which is the central phenomenon of the present study. Besides that, data will be gathered to investigate the primary use of television by the three viewers. It will be used to answer the question, Is television conceive as primarily a device for leisure time use and entertainment, or more broadly as a tool and resource from which self-conscious and directed learning may take place. I suspect that (my second hypotheses) the medium is considered by the three viewers as an easy source of entertainment. The third area is to analyze the personalities of the viewers. Viewer's interests, goals and perception interplay with their patterns of viewing behavior. This type of data may be used as supporting evidences for the conclusions made.

### Method

The present study focused on television viewing in the homes of the viewers. The observations will be used to support and verify or to ridicule the general hypothesis of the study. The meanings of the phenomena in observation will be from the perspective of the viewers. The procedures employed to carry out this project were participant observation, in-depth interviews and the use of informants.

The settings were in three viewers's apartments, two in Cooperstown and one in Shawneetown. The subjects chosen would have to fit into the criteria according to the nature of the equipment and programming channels available on the owner's TV set. The first subject has a TV set accessible to only three public channels. The second subject has a TV set with basic cable plus HBO and Cinemax. The third subject owns a TV set hooked to a cable service with HBO, and a remote control and stereo hook-up.

Data were collected in at least three visits in each viewer's apartment. Time chosen for visits were in consideration of convenience and regular viewing session of respondents. No visit lasted longer than three hours. In total, the empirical basis for this study was established through 24 hours of note taking observation and around eight additional hours of general observation and interviewing.

Two of the subjects are Malaysians. The third is an Indonesian. Generally, the subjects have a common language and culture.

Interviewing followed a loosely structured schedule. The schedule was standard and the same questions were administered to the three subjects. The questions were all open-ended. Caution was taken not to feed any meanings or possible answers to the respondents. All answers were recorded in order of utterance by the subject.

Note-taking was done on the spot. As in the case of my roommate whom I did not inform of the study, I took special precaution not to make him aware that I was observing him. In each setting, the programs watched were recorded. Interviews were recorded by hand.

Most of the observations were focused on the personal viewing pattern of the subject. The reason was that the viewers generally watched television alone. But, in the case of my roommate, his friend occasionally came to our apartment to watch television on weekends. At almost all times, there was none or minimal interaction during the viewing period.

The study was set into three stages:

1. The initial stage of collecting basic like how often does respondent watches television, when does he usually watch, etc.
2. Observations on behavioral patterns of viewing
3. In-depth interview

## Findings

In relation to the technological and programming structure of their television sets, viewers portray quite distinct patterns of viewing. Broadly speaking, three types of behavior were observed: one, viewer seek out specific program to watch by referring to program guide or just memory; two, viewer choose among programs available by using the channel buttons or tunig; three, viewer does not really care what program to watch or viewer unconsciously tune in to something he likes.

Viewer A who has a TV set accessible to three public channels and Kentucky Educational Television (Ket), most of the times tends to seek out specific programs because he knows and remembers when his favorite programs are an the air. Viewer B who has a TV set which is connected to cable service and two movie channels tends to choose deliberately using the tuning buttons on the cable box. Viewer C who owns a TV set attached to basic cable service, HBO, has a remote control and a stereo hook-up tends to be less conscious when selecting a program to see.

But, it should be noted that viewing behaviours should not be rigidly classified into such categories in relation to the technological and programming structure of the TV set. Some leeway should be considered. Patterns of viewing are flexible at certain times. But, it is always the case with the three viewers that a certain type of equipment and programming availability relates to a regular general pattern of a type of behavior.

### Viewer A: The Case of the Viewer with Public Channels

Viewer A has a general guideline of what programs are available throughout the week at almost any particular time he is free to watch television. He had a program guide posted at his study desk. The program guide was cut from the newspaper, **Lexington Herald Leader**. It was supposed to be permanent and was posted throughout the semester. Viewer A said that he is now able to remember what programs are available at a particular time. He had looked at the program guide a couple of times at the beginning of the semester. But, he has not looked at it since then.

Viewer A said that he relies on his memory power in helping to decide what to watch. Furthermore, viewer A said that he knew when his favorite programs are on the air. Also, it is easy to remember programs because the same show is aired on the same slot every week days. For instance, the cartoon series "He Man" is shown at the same time of the week. Although viewer A's TV could get access to Kentucky Educational Television (KET), he

never watched it.

Being an undergraduate student majoring in Engineering, there are certain period of the day that viewer A is free. Viewer A normally watch television from 4 to 8 p.m. almost every day. His viewing hours are more on weekends. Most of Viewer A's favorite shows are on the air within that period. Viewer A seldom missed his favorite shows like "He Man," "Gomer Pyle," evening news, and "Different Strokes."

Viewer A highly regards television as a medium of entertainment. The first criteria he mentioned as the reason to own a television is for entertainment. In addition, the first reason he came up for wanting to watch television is entertainment. Viewer A's high entertainment values makes him in need or in search of an easy source of medium for entertainment. Television suits such criteria. Television, too, suits his needs. The big reason is that television is affordable to be owned. Viewer A said that it is very difficult for him to be without television. He labelled or called himself as a "tv-holic." Viewer A went to see movies about twice a month.

Certain types of programs appealed so much to Viewer A. According to his roommate, Viewer A likes to watch comedy- and action-type programs. Viewer A's roommate describe him as being calm while watching television. But, once in a while Viewer A would laugh wildly especially while watching comedies.

Viewer A has strong desire to watch his favorite programs. He would make a great effort to see his favorite shows everytime they are on the air. Some of his favorite listings are "Miami Vice," "Knight Rider," "Misfit of Science," "He Man", "Duke of Hazard," and news. Those programs reflect his interests in a particular character and forms or images. Cartoon images appealed Viewer A most.

Viewer A regards watching television as a personal matter. He will take the small 5" portable set along into the bathroom or anywhere if he feels he want to watch television.

Cartoon is one of his favorite program. His favorite cartoon series is "He Man." The reason he likes cartoon is because of the images. Viewer A subscribes to a magazine, Spiderman. Viewer A is 20 years old and the youngest of the three viewers chosen for the study.

Viewer A regards his self-interest as very important. His attitudes toward television and certain types of programs reflect his personal interests and goals. Entertainment is the major goal when he wanted to watch television. Often, he watches television alone. A few times I saw him watching TV while lying in bed with a headphone attached to a walkman stereo player. The set was placed on his study desk which was at the side of his bed. He was concentrating on his favorite show, "Miami Vice."

Viewer A also regards the TV set as his close companion. He takes the set with him almost anywhere he goes when he feels it was rational and convenient. During the Thanksgiving break, he brought the TV set along to Memphis, Tennessee. But, he complaint that the reception was bad in the car. He went to Memphis with his roommate.

The second reason he gave for watching television is to keep him company.

"I feel lonely. I need its company," he said.

Viewer A added that most of the times he does not have anyone to talk to. His roommate is to quite. His roommate occupies most of his time studing, according to Viewer A.

Viewer A felt that the available channels on his TV set are more than enough to fulfill his entertainment needs. That was the main reason he did not subscribe to the cable channels.

In conclusion, in the case of Viewer A, limited channels mean limited choices. Limited number of choices make it easier to choose among available programs. As a person, Viewer A has interests on certain images and format of programs. He pays a lot of attention on his favorite shows. Thus he easily remembers them well. These characteristics help to form a framework of behavioral patterns for Viewer A. In most occasion, Viewer A seek out specific program to watch and he recalls the program's time using his memory.

#### **Viewer B: The Case of a Viewer with Basic Cable Programming, HBO and Cinemax**

The technological and programming structure of television set belonging to Viewer B, basic cable with two movie channels, enables him to get access to 32 channels. The number of channels available for Viewer B certainly is much more than the basic public channels available on Viewer A's television set. So, Viewer B has more choice in deciding what to watch. In general, Viewer B would settle down at any time he is free and choose among the programs available.

When Viewer B wanted to watch television, he would switch on the set, skim through all the channels, then tune in to the one that appealed the most at that particular time. Viewer B would take his own sweet time in deciding what to watch. He has to go to the TV and press the channel selection of the cable box each time he wanted to switch on to another channel. A few times, I could hear Viewer B utter a frustrating remark like "Uh!" when the program ended only a few minutes after he had sat down to watch. He didn't like the idea of having to walk to the TV set to switch channels.

Often at night, when viewer B wanted to watch a movie, he would refer to the Cable Guide to find out what is on the air. So, he had a choice of whether to see HBO or Cinemax. Viewer B looked into the Cable Guide before he switched on the TV set. If he went straight and switched on the TV, he would skim through all the channels including HBO and Cinemax. If the movie appeared to attract him and if he had not watched it before, he would leave the set tuned in to the movie. Then he sat down and watch. He might or might not refer to the Cable Guide to find out the title of the movie which had already started.

When I confronted Viewer B with the question of how does he choose the programs to watch, Viewer B said that it is the channel selection on the cable box (while pointing at it). He added that the only time he refers to the Cable Guide is when he wanted to see a movie.

Viewer B does have some favorite programs. But, he does not make any strong attempt to watch them when they are on the air. Viewer B said that the main reason he wanted to watch television is to occupy his leisure time. He added that viewing television might "release boring (while) staying and studying in the United States."

Viewer B is 36 years old. He came from Indonesia. He had to leave his wife and two children in Indonesia while being in the States. He is now pursuing for his doctorate in Agricultural Economics. He has been in the States for more than two years and has never gone back home since he was in the U.S.

When being at home during the day, Viewer B likes to watch soap opera and game shows. He did not stick to any particular show. For instance today, Viewer B would watch

“Wheel of Fortune.” The next day, he would see “Family Feud.”

Some of the shows that he often watched were “Three’s Company,” “The Price is Right,” “Scooby Doo,” “The Gong Show,” “Jackport,” “As the World Turns,” “Makes Me Laugh,” “Private Benjamin,” “Gomer Pyle,” “The Jeffersons.” and news. Viewer B also likes to watch football, boxing and movies.

Viewer B used most of his time studying. Watching television is mainly for the purpose of relaxing after being bored of studying. Viewer B filled his bored times watching the images on television. He put a high valued on television as being an entertainment medium. The first reason he gave for wanting to own a TV is for entertainment. Viewer B regards TV as something necessary to have.

“No way I can get along without TV,” he said.

When Viewer B sat down for an evening to watch television, he always made the effort to skimmed through all the channels before settling down. But when he made the decision it was usually on the program he regularly watch.

Being a graduate student, Viewer B places a high value on education. He normally study up to six hours a day. While watching television, he always had a journal article in his hand.

Viewer B was usually calm and quiet while he was watching television. He normally smoked while sitting in front of the TV set. The strange thing is that when Viewer B was watching alone, you could hardly hear the sound or voice from the set. He kept the volume of the TV very low. At times, there was no sound at all.

One afternoon when I came back from class, I saw Viewer B watched television without any sound coming from the set. He was holding a journal article and a lighted cigarette.

On weekends, we normally had a regular guest who came to watch TV. He is a close friend of Viewer B. The guest likes to watch movies on HBO and Cinemax. Sometimes, he would watch movies after movies until about four o’clock in the morning.

“Any nude movies?” Those are the words he regularly uttered as he stepped into our apartment.

The main reason Viewer B wanted to subscribe to the movie channels was because he would like to watch nude actresses in the movies.

“I also like hot stuff,” he said.

Viewer B has a preference on Cinemax as the first choice among the movie channels.

In conclusion, Viewer B was found less active than Viewer A in deciding what to watch. Unlike Viewer A, Viewer B does not strongly attached to any particular types of programs. His preference to watch soft pornographic pictures in the movies is influenced by a friend.

Being moderately active, Viewer B often times responds to images that struck his emotions at a particular time while he was skimming through the channels. Since he has to walk to the set in order to make selection, Viewer B makes deliberate selection of what to

watch. He normally stood for about a minute and previewing something that seems to attract him for a moment before leaving the set to go and sit down.

**Viewer C: The Case of a Viewer with Basic Cable Programming, HBO, a Remote Control and a Stereo Hook-UP**

Viewer C owns a TV accessible to 31 different channels on cable and HBO. With 31 channels available at any one time, Viewer C tends to use the remote control, while lying on the sofa, to skim through all the channels and finds something attracting his attention at that particular time. Here is an example of how he made a choice of what to watch one afternoon.

While he was looking at one channel to another, he was attracted to a telephone in a car.

Viewer C: "Look at that terrific telephone."

So, Viewer C left the set tuned to channel 31. It was a program on cellular telephone. Viewer stretched his body on the sofa and relaxed quietly. He follows the program with full concentration. He placed the remote control on the table.

Later, when the program was over, he took the remote control and press the control buttons. He glanced at each channel for approximately 20 seconds before proceeding to another channel. The process went on and on until something attracted his attention. If none of the sequence of meaningful images of the regular programs seemed to attract him at that moment, he would end up at MTV (Music Television). His set has a stereo hook-up, so the sound is good.

One afternoon, after a badminton game, I went to Viewer C's house to gather some data. Every Sunday, we played badminton together. When we were in his apartment, Viewer C switch on the TV. It was on channel 26, ESPN. The program featured a physical exercise program with a male actor. Then, he went to the kitchen to make some drinks. Later, he sat down on the sofa. He observed the yoga exercise for about 15 minutes. He seemed to stare blankly on the screen. After that, he took his remote control and began to switch from one channel to next. Finally, he settled down on a channel featuring also a physical exercise program. This time the exerciser was a women. He left it on for about 10 minutes.

Everytime I observed Viewer C switched on the set, it would surely be on channel 26 (ESPN). Viewer C likes sports especially fishing. One time, there was a fishing program on channel 26. He watched the whole show. While watching the program, he told me about his experience on fishing. He had gone as far as Florida for fishing. Viewer C said that he had seven rods and reels.

I asked Viewer C how he decides what to watch. He pointed at the remote control. Viewer C also subscribe to the weekend editions of the *Lexington Herald Leader*. He said that he seldoms read the program guide.

"I glance at it once amonth," he said.

Viewer C regards watching television as a relaxing activity during his leisure time.



He enjoyed watching some of the programs. The first reason he gave for wanting to have TV is for entertainment. He added that he uses television for information and as a company.

Unlike Viewer B, Viewer C has specific hobbies. Viewer C put serious attention toward his hobbies. He likes to associate his hobbies to the choice of programs he wanted to watch on television. Viewer C knew that a fishing program normally is aired on Sundays. Viewer C subscribes a magazine on fishing.

Like Viewer B, Viewer C loves to watch television. When I asked Viewer C if he can be without television, he replied, "No way." Viewer C has a higher sense for variations on types of programs to watch. Viewer C said that he wanted to have cable so that he could get wider scope of programming, especially with the sports channel, ESPN, MTV and movies. Viewer C also has a high appreciation on music. When nothing attracted him on the other channels or when he is preoccupied with something, he would left the TV tuned into MTV or VH-1 with stereo sound system. Viewer C watched MTV and VH-1 more on weekends.

Viewer C used to subscribe to all the movie channels, HBO, Cinemax, The Movie Channel and Showtime at one time. Later, he decided to trim down to only a channel, that is, HBO. The reason he gave was that there were alot of repetition of the same movies on all the movie channels. Once he saw a movie on Cinemax, then the same movie appeared on Showtime. He said that it was like a cycle of programs.

Viewer C felt that generally, there are sufficient channels to fill his entertainment needs. But, he said that the movie channels are not enough. Viewer C had seen some movies more than once because there was nothing else interesting to watch.

Like Viewer A and B, Viewer C also regarded viewing television as a personal activity. Viewer C will watch TV during the times he was tired of studying or he has a free time. He said that he did not have any special program of interest at the time he wanted to see TV. Whatever he watched was based on his mood or the appeals of the pictures at that particular time. He uses the remote control to help in deciding whatever might attract his attention while he was skimming through the channels.

One the late afternoon, Viewer C does have a preference of what to watch. If he was in front of the TV at about the time Gomer Pyle was on the air, he would always want to watch it. Other than that, Viewer C has no special preference of any programs. All programs are equally likely to be seen at most of the times.

In conclusion, Viewer C is the most passive viewer of the three when relating to specific program selection. On sunday, Viewer C would switched on the TV and watch almost anything that was on the air on channel 26. He would unconsciously leave the set on hoping that his favorite hobby would bob later on the show.

## Discussion

The study exhibited some forms of relationship between the technological and programming structure of television and behavioral patterns of viewing. Generally, a certain type of structure about television can be related to a certain type of viewing patterns or viewer's style of making choice of what programs to watch on television. But, it should not be overemphasized that certain technological and programming structure of television influence certain patterns of viewing behavior. Factors that should be considered also are

viewer's interests, goals and perceptions when relating to television and the programs.

Basically, the study showed that television is conceived as primarily a device for leisure time use and entertainment. All viewers regard TV as an easy source of entertainment. It can be understood that they all perceived TV as a necessity.

Further studies should be conducted to investigate whether a viewer is proactive or reactive is due to mainly due on the structure of programming and technology of set or mainly due to viewer's personalities. In the case of Viewer A, is it difficult to explain whether his behavior of being proactive (he actively select what to watch) is due to the nature of his set (with only three channels available) or because he has some specific interest. It seems both are related. But the central question is which factors are more influential, internal or external? This would be an interesting phenomenon to be discovered in the future.

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