The Relationship Between Content Genres and Choice of Viewing Platforms

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Abstract

A total of 100 college students at a medium-sized southeastern university took an online survey to determine relationships between the content genres they watch and the platforms they choose to view them. The genres examined were dramas, comedies, and movies. Viewing platforms focused on cable television and over-the-top (OTT) services. We hypothesized that college students would be more likely to watch drama series on cable television, and more likely to watch comedies and movies on OTT services. We based these predictions on prior research that indicated a trend towards online viewing among millennials, as well as the consistently high share for prime-time dramas on cable. The results indicated that respondents were more likely to watch content on OTT platforms, rather than on cable television, regardless of the genre of the programming.

Introduction

In today's technologically-centered world, the ways through which people consume and interact with media content is in a constant state of flux. With the rise of the Internet comes a paradigm shift that revolutionizes the ways media content can be consumed. Consumption of entertainment media is no longer confined to television sets and DVD players, as the innovation of video streaming websites is radically changing the way people watch their programming. These video streaming sites are offerings of over-the-top content delivery systems (OTT) that deliver media over the Internet without a multiple-system operator controlling the distribution of content. Millennials in particular can watch their favorite television shows and movies instantly on a plethora of video streaming websites like Hulu, Netflix, and Amazon.

With this great variety of choices in ways to consume media, how do consumers choose one platform over another? Will OTT services completely cannibalize cable television subscriptions? Or will these various ways to consume media be used interchangeably for reasons particular to the consumer? These questions are of growing importance in today's multi-platform age. Video streaming service providers and entertainment media creators alike could benefit greatly from this kind of knowledge, as cable television providers are at a risk of losing business if consumers choose to abandon their subscriptions in favor of online video streaming services. In addition, OTT content providers need to know what content genres and attributes of their delivery method they must focus their attention on to be successful.

The purpose of this study is to determine whether consumers' choice of viewing platform, cable television or OTT services, differs according to the genre of content they are watching. Using a convenience sample of 100 college students at a medium-sized southeastern campus, we tested three hypotheses predicting significant relationships between content genres

and viewing platforms. We chose to focus on three content genres of entertainment media (comedy series, drama series, and movies) to determine whether the choice of viewing platforms (cable television versus OTT) correlated to a particular genre. We selected these genres based on a recent study conducted by the Conference Board and TNS, which showed that dramas and comedies were among the most four most popular online genres (Cha, 2012). We included the movie genre as a baseline by assuming that all consumers watch movies at some point, regardless of personal preferences. We chose to include movies as a baseline genre due to our personal judgment regarding the widespread popularity and success of movies across all audiences.

This study will review the literature relevant to our topic to support our hypotheses, will describe the method and measurements used to run statistical tests with the variables, will report the results of those tests, and will provide a comprehensive discussion that analyzes the meaning of those results and how they can be interpreted.

Literature Review

We consulted the following seven different scholarly journals and studies to derive our three hypotheses.

Cha (2013) conducted this study to identify how consumer perceptions of online video platforms do or do not affect their intention to use Internet and/or cable television to do their watching. The author used a survey conducted with 1,500 employed adults who use the Internet. Results showed that consumers who perceived online video platforms to be different than television in ability to satisfy their TV watching needs were more likely to use the online platform. In essence, the more compatible consumers felt with the online platform, the less likely they were to watch cable television. The theoretical explanation behind this behavior is called

Theory of Planned Behavior, which suggests that human behavior is determined by an individual's intent to perform that behavior, based on attitudes towards the behavior, perceptions of control, and the surrounding subjective norms (Cha, 2013).

In another study, Cha (2012), sought to discover three main truths about consumer habits within this new realm of content consumption. How have changing motives for watching content altered accuracy in predictions of intent of using television and intent of using the Internet as an online viewing platform; How does platform preference differ based on content genre; and, how does audience choice of content genres differ based on platform type? A total of 149 students were surveyed at a large university, ultimately revealing that motives for viewing similar genres differ according to platform type. Active viewing patterns in audiences has led uses and gratifications researchers to distinguish media consumption into two categories: ritualistic and instrumental. Ritualistic viewing centers on the medium, instrumental viewing focused on the selective content (Cha, 2012).

Lafayette in 2015 examined the reality of how few recorded television shows actually get watched. According to Lafayette's study done on one week's worth of viewing activity by 56,000 TiVo subscribers, only about 20% of the 85 hours of recorded programming was actually watched within three days of recording. The study claimed that the multi-channel, multi-platform, online, on demand, streaming, mobile, and Television Everywhere environment has created an impossibly large universe for new scripted programming. Increased competition has made it harder for good programming to be noticed not only alongside its current counterparts, but also every show ever made with the availability of infinite on-demand libraries (Lafayette, 2015).

Nielsen evaluated news, drama, reality, sitcoms, and sports to compare primetime viewership across each. In a three-party, annual study, spanning from 2009 to 2011, they found that across these five primetime genres, drama series accounted for the largest share of viewership, time-shifting, and ad expenditure. This finding greatly contributed to our first hypothesis regarding viewership of drama on cable compared to viewership of drama on OTT platforms ("TV Dramas," 2012).

A study done by Baumgartner in 2015 state that approximately 181 million people used an OTT service to watch video content, according to an eMarketer survey. The same study also reported that nine out of ten of today's viewers watched content on OTT services. In 2015, of these OTT services, Netflix led the pack with 20.4% market penetration of all OTT users, Hulu closely being at 16.2% penetration, and Amazon occupied the third position with 13.5% penetration. It is projected that the sheer number of OTT video services users will grow to an estimated 1869 million in 2016 and 199.6 million in 2019. Along with this growth we may expect to see an overtaking of Netflix growth by Hulu and Amazon, according to eMarketer research (Baumgartner, 2015).

Hayes reviewed an interview conducted at the 2016 NATPE conference with Van Toffler, Cofounder and President of an up-and-coming OTT service, Gunpowder and Sky, Toffler spoke about the current and future success of the OTT service space. Toffler stressed the importance of opportunity in domestic TV distribution, noting that "These pipes all need to be filled and they need to be filled by premium content." Executive VP of digital enterprises of NBCUniversal Evan Shapiro focused on another sector of the rapidly evolving OTT marketplace; Bundling. Shapiro foresaw an OTT marketplace where players could do that for consumers, and that was the direction the market would be heading (Hayes, 2016).

Hawkins (2001) noted that aside from the standard demographic predictors, such as age, gender, income level, etc., Howkins examined the impact of more inferential demographics, such as personality traits, cognition styles, values and beliefs, on mass media consumption. Similarly, research done by Perse in 1998 shows a correlation between adult viewers' likelihood to change channels during a favorite program, regardless of the genre of the favorite program. Based on Perse's work, Hawkins (2001) hypothesized that, "perceived expertise with a genre should be correlated with selective exposure to that genre". The hypothesis was tested with 174 college students, and the author found that those who regarded themselves as experts in situation comedies watched significantly more comedies than would be expected based on their total hours of viewing. However this corresponding correlation for drama series was not found to be significant (Hawkins, 2001).

A study done by Rubin (1983) reported that viewing for the sake of entertainment was unrelated to the type of favorite program. In individuals who participated in the study who chose to watch television with the goal of seeking entertainment, amusement, or to pass the time, Rubin found that those individuals had a greater affinity for that medium without being inclined to prefer any particular type of content genre. On the contrary, those who reported television viewing for the purpose of self-informing showed a greater affinity for watching particular genres, such as news, game shows, and talk-interview shows (Rubin, 1983).

Preston and Clair (1994) suggested that genre choice is succinct with viewers' attitudes and expectations on a deeper level. They found that genre choice remains relatively stable across shows and episodes, genre choice could be a clear marker of altering perceptions in viewers of the instrumentality of various genres, and genre choice could also influence the way content is interpreted by the viewer. "... audiences use genre conventions to 'decode' and interpret specific

television messages, although the exact strategies employed by viewers vary. Thus, genre is a meaningful concept not just for researchers interested in classifying content, but also for audiences attempting to interpret that content" (Preston, 1994).

Braun (2013) delved into the sociologically relevant relationships that can be found in the innovations being made in the realm of television distribution over the internet. Researchers who have previously focused on the production of media are now turning towards the politics of distribution and how new media is created with future movement in mind, developing terms like "spreadability", "flows", and "information streams" (Braun, 2013). He suggests that the creation of video sharing sites like Hulu was the television industries attempt to combat piracy in an age in which consumers are becoming accustomed to illegal sharing and ad-free content. Braun concludes that "changes to entrenched models of media distribution are complex and fraught with conflicting interests", and that the present conflicts between media creators and online distributions "will shape the terms on which television reaches all our screens in the future" (Braun, 2013).

Doyle (2016) examined how broadcasters are changing their strategies regarding the packaging and distribution of television content in response to changing audience behavior, using BBC Three as a case study. As consumer habits evolve, shifting towards non-linear viewing and away from traditional broadcast television, the changes television distributers must input "naturally have a bearing on costs, discontinuation of distribution via a linear broadcasting channel, [and] will yield only relatively modest cost savings on distribution" (Doyle, 2016). Sustaining their image as being current and youth oriented, the BBC announced the closure of one of their television channels in favor of an online-only service and also actively engaging audiences through social media and resulting in cost savings. Doyle concludes that "the

supremacy of channels as a vehicle for distribution of television content stems from their

unrivaled ability, through bundling and branding, to make choices easier for viewers in an

environment of ever greater abundance and choice", supporting the notion that the cultural

switch towards OTT services is unavoidable (Doyle, 16).

Hypotheses

H_1: College students are more likely to watch drama series on cable than on OTT platforms.

While contemplating the relationship between drama series and choice of platform for

viewing consumption, we came across evidence supporting both sides: preferences for cable as

well as for online platforms. A recent study by Nielsen found that TV dramas accounted for the

most primetime television viewing, while a study conducted by the Conference Board and TNS

found that drama series are among the most popular genres to stream online ("TV Dramas,"

2012; Cha, 2012). To support the rationale for H_1, we took into account the community aspect

that is found in the collective viewing phenomenon, such as "watch parties" and being a part of

the live conversations. Many young people who follow the same primetime drama series, be it

Game of Thrones or *The Walking Dead*, enjoy experiencing each new installment in the

company of fellow fans of the show, be it in person, on social media, or through conversations.

Therefore, we concluded that college students would be more likely to watch these drama series

collectively on cable television sets as opposed to smaller laptop screens. Our second hypothesis

stated:

H_2: College students are more likely to watch comedy series on OTT platforms than on cable.

On the other hand, we viewed comedy series as a genre that does not incite as much

collective viewing as their dramatic counterparts. Entertainment media consumption can be

divided into two categories: ritualistic and instrumental viewing (Cha, 2012). Ritualistic

viewings center on the choice of viewing platform more so than the actual content being consumed, meaning it is less selective and more of a "time-filling activity." Thus, it involves diversionary motives, such as habit or the "passing of time." Instrumental viewing, on the other hand, is intentional and deliberate about what content is being consumed. It requires more audience involvement and attention, and is associated with "goal-directed motivations such as information seeking, behavioral guidance, or arousal." Much of the time, comedy series fall under the category of ritualistic viewing, as many of them require little-to-no audience involvement to follow along with the short episodes. While this literature review suggested that television use in general is more closely linked to ritualistic viewing than instrumental, we decided to draw from personal experience once again, using a current perspective given the availability of online substitutes and suggest the opposite in our second hypothesis: comedy series are consumed by college students more often on online platforms than cable television. We suggested this because many of the most popular comedy series have hundreds of existing, familiar episodes that require minimal audience attention, and, from our experience, are frequently mindlessly binged watched by college students or to pass the time.

H$_3$: College students are more likely to watch movies on online platforms than on cable.

Even with the rise of on-demand movie services through cable providers, it is difficult to beat the ease that online movie streaming services offer. In a case study conducted using BBC Three, researchers found that by "bundling and branding" a service and increasing its' ease of use and variety, consumers will be drawn to that service (Doyle, 2016). In another study that used the technology acceptance model (TAM) to determine a consumer's perceived ease of use of a technology, researchers found that the "perceived ease of use is a significant factor that affects consumers' intentions to use Internet-based technologies" (Cha, 2013). This information,

coupled with the enormous variety of selection, and low price offered by online streaming sites, lead us to hypothesize that college students choose to consume movies more on online platforms than on cable.

Method

Data Collection

We collected data for this study using an online questionnaire created through Google Forms. The link to the survey was distributed throughout undergraduate classes in the School of Communication at the University of Miami, as well as to several sororities. The sample size totaled 100 respondents.

To increase our sample size, our survey was distributed through sororities, specifically the University of Miami chapters of Delta Gamma, Sigma Delta Tau, and Delta Phi Epsilon. Therefore, there were significantly more female participants than males: 95% of the respondents identified themselves as female, 4% as male, and 1% as another gender.

Measurement

The survey was comprised of 10 closed-ended questions, one open-ended question, one multiple response question, and three demographic questions. Participants were first asked whether or not they subscribed to cable and whether they subscribed to an OTT service, such as Netflix, Hulu, or Amazon. These questions were coded on a nominal scale as 1 for "yes" and 2 for "no." Next, we asked for the reasoning behind why participants selected "no" for subscribing to either cable or an OTT service. These two questions were based on an interval scale and the answers were coded as follows: 1 for "I do subscribe to a cable/OTT service," 2 for "cost," 3 for "convenience," 4 for "availability of substitutes," 5 for "taste of shows," and 6 for "other."

In order to test our three hypotheses, participants were then asked to rate the amount of time they spent watching a specific genre on each service. The response categories were coded as 1 for "less than once a week," 2 for "once a week," 3 for "multiple times a week," and 4 for "everyday." The multiple response question asked respondents to check off their preferred genres from a provided list, and the open-ended question asked what their favorite viewing platform was and why.

Analysis

The statistical analysis was run using a series of paired *T-tests* in SPSS. The pairings were completed by genre; comedy on cable (Q5) was paired with comedy on OTT services (Q6), drama on cable (Q7) was paired with drama on OTT services (Q8), and movies on cable (Q9) was paired with movies on OTT services (Q10). By comparing the means of the different variables, we were able to determine which platform college students at the University of Miami were using to watch a specific genre. We used the same method of analysis for every hypothesis. We also provided the descriptive statistics for demographic data (gender, ethnicity, and class standing).

<p style="text-align:center;">**Results**</p>

Sample Description

Of all participants, 59% reported subscribing to a cable service, and 94% reported subscribing to an OTT service. Of the 41% who did not subscribe to cable, 16% reported that the "availability of substitutes" was the reason for not choosing to subscribe to cable, 14% reported "cost," 10% reported "convenience," and 1% indicated that their reason was not listed. The 6% of participants that do not subscribe to an OTT service most frequently reported "availability of substitutes" and "taste of shows" as their reasons for not subscribing.

In regards to class standing, juniors were the most common respondents, comprising 35% of our study, followed by seniors (25%), sophomores (24%), freshmen (13%), and other (2%). Students who reported "other" stated they were either an exchange student or a graduate student. In our sample, 84% were Caucasian, 9% Non-White Hispanic, 3% African American, 3% Asian/Pacific Islander and 1% Other. For gender, 95% of our respondents were female and 4% were male.

Hypotheses

As previously stated, we used a paired sample *T-test* to test each hypothesis. H_1, predicted that college students were more likely to watch drama series on cable than on OTT services. It was not supported because the mean for drama series on cable (M=1.35, SD=0.611) was significantly lower than the mean for drama series viewed on OTT services (M=2.23, SD=0.939). The P-value (p = 0.000) was significant because it was less than p=.001 and t(df) value = 7.976. Since the mean for OTT services was higher than the mean for cable, this indicates that college students are more likely to watch drama series online and therefore, rather than on cable.

H_2 predicted that college students would be more likely to watch comedies on OTT services than on cable. It was supported because the mean for comedy series on OTT services (M=2.13, SD=0.933) was significantly higher than the mean for comedies viewed on cable (M=1.36, SD=0.646). The P-value (p=0.000) was significant because it was less than p=.001 and t(df) value = 6.856. Since the mean for OTT services was greater than the mean for cable, we concluded again that there is a higher likelihood for college students to watch comedy on OTT services, rather than on cable.

H_3 predicted that college students would be more likely to watch movies on OTT services than on cable. It was supported because the mean for movies on OTT services (M=1.77, SD=0.771) was significantly higher than the mean for movies viewed on cable (M=1.25, SD=0.560). The P-value (p=0.000) was significant because it was less than p=.001 and t(df) value = 5.972. Since the mean for movies was greater than the mean for cable, we concluded again that there is a higher likelihood for college students to watch movies on OTT services, rather than on cable.

Discussion

Since the P-value was less than 0.001 for all three paired sample *T-tests*, the results for all three tests were significant. Across all three genres, the mean for online viewing was higher than the mean for cable viewing. This finding indicates that the majority of participants are more likely to watch all three of these content genres on OTT services, rather than on cable television.

But these results are inconsistent with our H_1 prediction that consumers tend to watch dramas on cable more than on OTT services. Therefore, H_1 was not supported. By contrast, the results are consistent with the H_2 prediction that consumers tend to watch comedy shows on OTT services more than on cable, therefore, H_2 was supported. Similarly, the results are consistent with the H_3 prediction that consumers tend to watch more movies on OTT services than on cable, therefore. Therefore, H_3 was also supported.

We were not surprised by these results, or that 94% of participants subscribe to an OTT service, because we suspected that the majority of college students consume a large amount of content online. However, we were surprised by the sizable difference in results between the two platforms that indicated how significantly lower viewing habits on cable television were in comparison to OTT platforms. Across all genres, less than 10 participants per genre indicated

they watched cable television "multiple times a week" or "every day." For OTT services, on the other hand, 17 respondents reported watching movies "multiple times a week," and more than 30 respondents per genre of drama and comedy reported watching "multiple times a week." This comparison suggests two conclusions: that college students are watching content on OTT services on a regular basis and far more so than on cable, and that their viewing habits do not appear to fluctuate across platforms, regardless of the genre they are watching.

Before running these tests, we did not anticipate that there would be such an overwhelming contrast in viewing habits between the two platforms. Therefore, when we formulated our hypotheses, we concluded that students might be more apt to watching dramas on cable television, because the big three networks' primetime shows typically fall into this genre category with a large, live, weekly following ("TV Dramas," 2012). However, we have now speculated reasons as to why H_1 was not supported. First, we neglected to consider the financial status of students at the University of Miami. Fourteen percent of our sample indicated that paying a high cable bill, was their main objection. Many college students may not have the budget to pay for a monthly cable bill and therefore, may opt for one or several of the lower-priced OTT services. Secondly, we reasoned that the students' place of residence could have had an effect on these results since lack of convenience was the another common objection to purchasing a cable subscription, at 10%. Although the freshmen on campus have access to pre-installed cable in the dorms, the University of Miami notoriously has a large population of students who live off campus after their first year and may not be proactive to take the necessary steps to set up a cable subscription.

Interestingly, still more than half of our sample answered that they do subscribe to cable, about 59%. In addition, the "availability of substitutes" objection to purchasing cable ranked first

place at 16%. From this data, we determined that even though a good portion of students have in fact, a cable subscription, they are still making the active decision to watch their content online. We believe this conclusion may be due to the convenience of being able to watch essentially anything online, at any time, which suits the lifestyle of a busy college student that may not be home regularly in the evening to watch live television.

However, there are some weaknesses with our study that could have contributed to skewed results. Looking at the gender demographics, 95 females participated, in comparison to four males. This female-based sample was obtained due to the fact that all of us authors are in sororities, and we posted the survey in our sorority Facebook groups in order to get more responses. During our time at the university, we have all taken notice that our male peers often have "watch parties" with their roommates to view University of Miami basketball games, National Football League (NFL) games, and other live sports broadcasts on cable television. Therefore, we concluded that male college students may be more likely to subscribe to a cable provider, simply to have access to the ESPN network. Including a greater number of males in the sample may have narrowed the difference in results we saw between viewing platforms with a predominantly female-based sample. Secondly, the ethnicity of our sample was mainly Caucasian, with less than 10 respondents per African American, Asian, and Hispanic ethnicity groups. Therefore, although we were striving to obtain a representative, convenience sample, several groups were underrepresented. To improve this study, we could replicate it and ensure that we obtain a representative, probabilistic sample, that gives all college students, regardless of their gender or race, an equal opportunity to be exposed to the survey. Finally, because we used a non-random sample, we are not able to generalize the results to the population.

In conclusion, college students at the University of Miami in this particular sample are far more likely to consume their content on OTT services, regardless of the genre they are watching. To improve this study, we could narrow down our hypothesis to test specifically what kinds of programming across these genres students are watching. Do college students use online services to binge watch old episodes, or are they catching the newest episode on Hulu? Are they watching any shows on television several days later on a DVR? Do they subscribe to OTT services such as Netflix and Hulu, or are they using Television Everywhere (TVE) to log into cable networks' websites to watch full episodes online? These specific questions would help us examine the root cause of college students' transition away from cable and determine if this traditional platform is truly in danger among this generation of millennials, or if there is still hope that cable television will be able to co-exist with its online competitors. Broadcast and cable networks, cable providers, OTT services, and media managers would benefit from this research to gain a better understanding of the modern day consumer's viewing habits and tastes. It is imperative that researchers continue to explore this topic so that the media industry is able to develop an effective multi-platform management plan.

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