

Attend the Audience: Changing Audience Analysis

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Much of the current literature regarding the post-television audience describes a highly participatory viewer who produces tangible markers that can be readily accessed and analyzed online. This subset has indeed proven to be a fairly influential group, however the focus on their habits cannot be generalizable to the post-television audience as a whole. In order to give further credence to the claim that the post-television audience is more interactive than in previous eras, 'interactivity' is therefore best conceptualized not in monolithic terms, but as a concept that encompasses a spectrum of activities, from the interpretative to the physical actions of the viewers.

If we consider those viewers who do not produce a footprint (digital or otherwise) as a result of their viewing, there is a tendency to consider them passive. Although passivity implies less effort, we should not lose sight of the more mundane, internalized articulation with media that characterizes a great deal of media consumption. Lurking online for example, produces a more enlightened, discerning, insightful consumer who develops a heightened viewing experience over one who simply views the text. Comparing page views vs. contributors on popular wikis such as *Lostpedia*, with actual rating statistics, it appears that the visitors who simply consult these online resources act as a more representative sample of the viewing audience. The incorporation of these viewers as 'active' should be more prevalent in the literature even though they do not produce any empirical evidence of it online.

Technology also plays an important role in the discussion of interaction in the post-television era, but often times their usages have become naturalized that they are often overlooked. Often times the simple act of perusing a television schedule, clicking a remote control or setting up a DVR aren't immediately considered 'interactive'. If, for example, a viewer wanted to dissect a particular scene by rewinding it and playing it in slow motion, the remote control would have significant impact in actualizing the interaction. Although the use of such technologies isn't necessarily unique to the post-television viewer, the naturalization of the use of such devices is, and should be considered in the spectrum of interactivity activities.

The various theories that constitute television audience studies tell us that striving toward a unified theory of reception is a herculean task. With the fragmentation of the audience in a digital age, finding a generalized conception of the post-television viewer is arguably proven more difficult. Post-television reception studies should consider the audience in two ways: not only as the collective intelligence that comprises most of the current literature, but the in the tradition of Morley (1992) and Ang (1982), as a collection of individuals. Perhaps

breaking down the audience into consumption patterns of specific television texts or niche groups is the only way to discover a representative picture.

Identifying the post-television viewer must allow for a multilayered conception which accounts for both individual practices and how those are conceptualized in broader strokes. A definition of the post-television viewer does not completely abandon the discussion regarding the content of a television text, but requires that we study it in tandem with its usage in everyday life. Media use is just as important as the content being consumed. The current claim that the post-television viewer is inherently a more active participant is one worth investigating but we must consider the multi-faceted environment in which the viewer is situated.

At the surface level, investigating the more mundane viewing habits of the post-television viewer is an exploration of the social context of leisure, but the implications of these choices are far more profound. Considering the influence of digital technology in our daily lives, understanding the current state of what we are watching and how we are watching it, is more vital than ever as activities undertaken in the private sphere, inevitably flow into the public domain, effecting cultural economics, policies, and ultimately defining citizenship in a digital age. There has been a long-standing tradition in communication studies that examines the role the media plays in the construction of the self. Striving for a more representative definition of a post-television audience contributes to the significant body of work examining the critical implications of consumers shaping and being shaped by the media.

The post-television viewer resides squarely in a digital context, but changes are evident not only in the nature of texts available but also cause for an entirely new set of naturalized media consumption habits to be adopted. Invariably, in order to establish an inclusive definition of the interactive post-television viewer we must examine the surrounding environment to which both the viewer and text inhabit. The notion of the participatory viewer is a large component of the post-television consumer, however, more pointed ethnographic study is required to more adequately develop the concept of "audience" in the digital age.