Coping with diversity: exposure to public-affairs TV in a changing viewing environment

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This dissertation studies the consequences of a changing viewing environment for exposure to news and current-affairs programs in the Netherlands from 1988 to 2010. The increasing variety of viewing alternatives has raised concerns about viewers who systematically drop out from news exposure or shift to more entertaining infotainment or soft-news formats. This study develops an integrated approach to audience behavior. Combining influences of viewing motivations and aspects of viewing situations yields a comprehensive understanding of viewing behavior. People-meter data on the level of individual viewers are used to analyze how viewers have responded to the expansion of choice opportunities. The results reveal that Dutch viewers have spent more time watching a greater diversity of public-affairs TV over the last two decades. These findings indicate stable habits of watching public-affairs TV and contradict fears of audience fragmentation and specialization.