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

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Publication date
2011

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Citation for published version (APA):

Wonneberger, A. (2011). *Coping with diversity: exposure to public-affairs TV in a changing viewing environment*. [Thesis, fully internal, Universiteit van Amsterdam].

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CHAPTER 1

Dynamics of Individual Television Viewing Behavior: Models, Empirical Evidence, and a Research Program

This article has been published in Communication Studies, 60(3): pp. 235–252 (2009).

Abstract

Television viewing often is a sequence of a multitude of activities that can vary tremendously from the moment the TV set is turned on until it is turned off again. Previous models of individual viewing behavior as well as empirical studies have focused on isolated aspects of viewing only, such as the frequency and duration of viewing or patterns of selecting a specific program. This paper draws attention to the complete process of TV viewing. We develop a process model to describe whole viewing sessions. Furthermore, a review of the empirical evidence on viewing behavior and a typology of factors influencing the viewing process are presented, concluded by a research program.

Despite massive changes in the new media landscape, TV viewing remains a popular leisure activity with an average duration of viewing times between three and four hours per person per day in countries like the United States, United Kingdom, Germany, and the Netherlands. This is why answers to questions like how TV viewing is embedded in everyday life, what kinds of programs are viewed, and which factors influence viewing behavior are still important. Previous research on individual viewing patterns has focused on isolated elements of viewing, such as viewing duration and frequency, program choice, and finding the first channel to stick to. However, one important characteristic of TV exposure is that it is a process. The way the viewer participates as well as the program offering changes continuously while the viewer is watching. He or she might want to view a specific program, get an overview of the ongoing programs or maybe simply use the TV as background noise. Perhaps a fascinating scene on the screen arouses attention while one scans through the channels. The viewer stays with that program for a while but zaps during commercial breaks. When losing interest, he or she might continue grazing for a while before turning the TV off. Such changes or sequential characteristics of whole viewing sessions have not been investigated so far. The aim of this conceptual paper is, therefore, to draw attention to TV viewing as a sequence of a whole range of activities.

We propose a research perspective that accounts for the consecutive character of television exposure. This fits into the recent discussion on integrating individual and structural determinants of television-viewing behavior (Cooper & Tang, 2008; Webster, 2009). So far, activity or passivity of TV viewing have been mainly explained by choice behavior. Distinguishing different viewing activities and considering their temporal order, as we suggest here, yields a more comprehensive description of viewing behavior. Of course, a better understanding of sequential viewing patterns is of practical relevance as well: for TV programmers who want to serve the demands of viewers and also for advertisers and media planners who are interested in the viewing habits of their target groups.

First, models of individual viewing behavior will be reviewed. On this basis, an integrated model of sequential viewing patterns will be developed to describe TV viewing throughout whole viewing sessions. In a second step, we will look at factors that influence viewing behavior. After a review of empirical findings on viewing behavior, a typology of possible influencing factors will be provided. Finally, we will formulate a research program for the investigation of sequential viewing patterns.

Models of TV Viewing

Research on TV viewing has always struggled with the question to which degree viewers are active or passive. On the one hand, mass-media communication is regarded as a one-way process with the medium as the predominant determinant of recipients' behavior. This structural approach focuses on the regularities of aggregated audience behavior (e.g., Rust & Alpert, 1984; Webster & Phalen, 1997). The opposite perspective has its origin in the uses-and-gratifications approach to media use. This approach assumes that viewers act more or less rationally, guided by individual needs and motives, by gratifications sought and obtained (e.g., Palmgreen, 1984; Rubin & Windahl, 1986). Certainly, most uses-and-gratifications models admit that there is at least some influence of the program offer on viewing behavior, or more general of the media system, and of social and cultural conditions. Much research on TV viewing is actually based on a theoretical compromise allowing for active as well as passive aspects of viewing. Individual characteristics as well as program-related attributes are taken into account when influence factors on TV viewing are described. Active and passive viewing is not regarded as mutually exclusive but as end points of a continuum of audience activity (e.g., Bilandzic, 2004; Rubin, 1984).

Based on this theoretical combination, several attempts have been made to map individual and structural factors that may influence viewing behavior. We will review previous models of individual viewing behavior that render such an integration. For that purpose, an exhaustive search of the literature was done. It revealed that all models so far have focused on program choice as dependent variable. A first type of models has focused on the factors that influence viewers in their viewing decisions. As such, models of program choice depict a static perspective on viewing behavior. Which strategies viewers apply to search for a program to watch has been described by a second type of model that we refer to as process models.

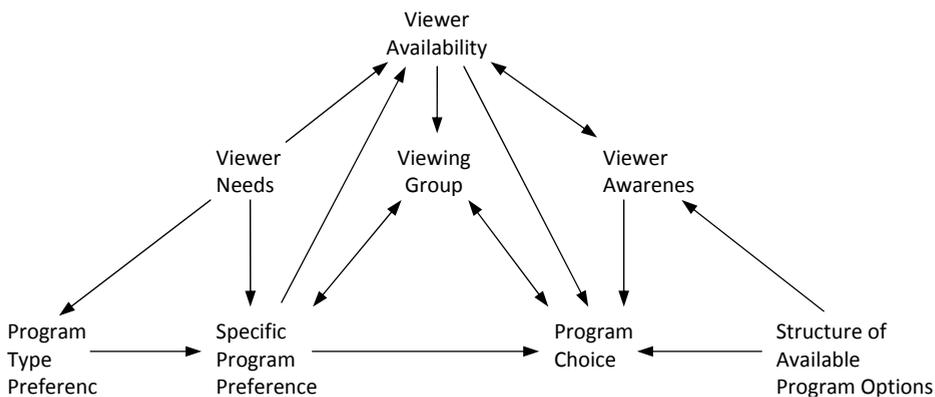
Models of Program Choice

A first comprehensive model of influencing factors on program choice was developed by Webster and Wakshlag (1983, see Figure 1.1) with the attempt to integrate the perspectives of the uses-and-gratifications approach and of rational-choice models. According to uses-and-gratifications, viewer choices are guided by needs and gratifications sought. Rational choice models assume that viewers seek to maximize their viewing utility by finding the best match between individual

preferences and the available program offer. Both perspectives anticipate that viewers choose programs because they contain content that viewers find useful.

Webster and Wakshlag introduced *viewer availability* as a precondition for their model. Quite plausibly, they assume that, prior to all further choices, a viewer needs to be able to watch. Viewers may become available because they expect a certain program offer, because they have needs and specific preferences. But viewers may also start watching simply because they have the time to do so. Once the decision to view is made, the authors assume that a viewer actively chooses between the alternatives at hand, primarily guided by individual preferences. The model distinguishes between long-term and short-term preferences. Enduring individual needs lead to the development of program type preferences. Transitory needs and long-term preferences together determine the short-term preference for a specific program.

Besides these individual attributes, the model includes as an influence factor the viewing group for the case of *social viewing*. Watching together with friends or family means that the viewer's preferences affect the group opinion on program choice and that those preferences are, in turn, affected by the group. The composition of the group is, again, determined by the availability of viewers but also by the program choice that is taken.

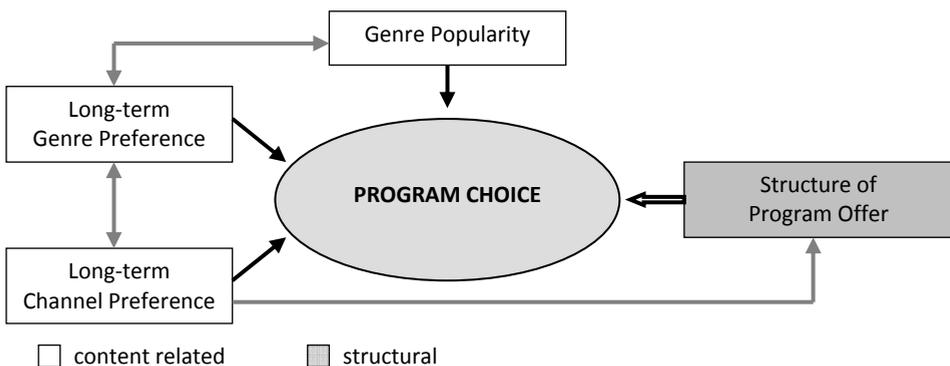


Source: Webster & Wakshlag, 1983: 433.

Figure 1.1 The Model of Program Choice by Webster and Wakshlag.

Choice is restricted by the often incomplete awareness of the program offer. Awareness and program choice are both influenced by the structure of available program options. These options depend on the number of channels as well as on scheduling and programming strategies.

The model of Webster and Wakshlag has been modified by others. The model of Klövekorn (2002, p. 36, see Figure 1.2) is much more differentiated in defining viewer preferences. It distinguishes between one's perceived interest for a program type (genre popularity) and the actual relevance of a program type within one's viewing behavior (long-term genre preference). Plus, habitual viewing choices do not only reflect genre preferences but also long-term preferences for channels. The impact of channel preferences on program choice had not been considered by the earlier model. With the distinction of long-term habits and interests, Klövekorn assumes that viewing choices do not necessarily have to be consistent with a proclaimed interest in certain program types. On the one hand, actual behavior is influenced by situational factors like moods and motives. So, viewing behavior is not always based on ideal choices. Instead, often the "least objectionable programming" (Jeffres, 1978) is chosen. On the other hand, actual choices are, of course, also determined by the available program offer.



Source: Klövekorn, 2002: 36.

Figure 1.2 The Model of Program Choice by Klövekorn.

However, Klövekorn does not account for specific program preferences as Webster and Wakshlag have done in their model. This is why the two models should be combined. In addition, we assume that – similar to one’s individual interest for a program type – individual expectations about channels may influence the choice for a program on a specific channel as well. To classify individual preferences it can, thus, be distinguished between preference objects and preference qualities. All three objects – channels, genres, and specific programs – can have three preference qualities contributing to program choice: viewing habits, long-term interests, and short-term interests.

Process Models

The two models of program choice so far do not include search patterns that viewers apply before finally making a choice and staying with a program. Process models fill that gap. They account for switching behavior and revisions of choices. The first of these models was developed by Heeter (1985).

The factors that influence search strategies in Heeter’s model differ from the factors of the final-choice models described so far. Because her model describes how viewers search through different channels, she focuses on channel-related viewing habits, i.e., on channel familiarity and channel repertoire. Channel familiarity indicates how many channels are known to a viewer. Channel repertoire comprises those channels that a viewer uses regularly – comparable to the long-term channel preferences of Klövekorn’s model. In contrast, content-related aspects, such as genre preferences, are not taken into account by Heeter. Next to channel familiarity and repertoire, Heeter assumes that other characteristics such as age, gender, education, availability of cable TV, and novelty-seeking have an impact on the search behavior of a viewer. Compared to the two models of final program choice, the emphasis here lies on individual aspects of one’s personality and viewing behavior. Aspects of the program offer are not included, apart from the number of channels available. Therewith, Heeter’s model implies a much more autonomous audience.

Heeter assumes two phases of searching for a program. The first phase of the search process is an orienting one during which a viewer gathers information about available alternatives by using a TV guide and/or switching through the channels. Three criteria determine the degree of the awareness of program alternatives:

- Processing mode: Processing is called *automatic* if a viewer searches the channels in a numerical order. It is called *controlled* if channels are selected in any other than a numerical order.
- Search repertoire: The search repertoire can be either *elaborated* if all or most channels are included or *restricted* if only a limited number of channels are considered.
- Evaluation orientation: The evaluation of the offer is *exhaustive* if the best option is chosen of all channels of an individual search repertoire. The evaluation is *terminating* if the search process is stopped as soon as one program appears to be acceptable.

After the first selection of a program, the choice process can be stopped, continued or restarted. So, an orienting search may be followed by a reevaluation period – the second phase of the choice process. In other words, Heeter introduces a dynamic component of TV viewing. Because the needs and moods of the viewer as well as the input may change while watching, the process of evaluating, searching and deciding could continue.

A second process model (Bilandzic, 1999) tries not only to be comprehensive in describing channel search procedures but also looks in a more detailed fashion at information processing and decision making during a program search. As opposed to Heeter, the model of Bilandzic emphasizes the impact of program content as the initial point of the viewing process. Individual aspects are relevant, then, in so far as they influence the perception and evaluation of contents.

Like the three models already described, Bilandzic seeks to explain how viewers decide to view a certain program. For that purpose, she draws on schema theory to introduce mental structures that determine perception and understanding of information (e.g., Fiske & Taylor, 1991). For her, the choice process starts with the perception of TV messages. The viewer begins by identifying and activating cognitive schemata for the processing of the information on the screen. These schemata can be related to program attributes such as channel, genre, program, TV personality, and subject. If a program does not fit a familiar schema, information processing can become more elaborated or explorative. Following the uses-and-gratifications approach to media exposure, gratifications sought form a second component of decision making. In addition to expectations concerning fulfillment of individual needs, moods, or motives, a viewer can also have more general expectations about the functionality of TV as such or of a certain channel or program. Schemata as well as expectations are influenced by references to one's own life and experiences with the media.

Also, the degree of intentionality during a choice process determines whether an offer is evaluated in a more heuristic or more systematic fashion (Bilandzic, 2004). In the *heuristic mode*, program evaluation is primarily based on salient attributes of TV messages – everything that immediately arouses attention, such as cuts, motions, and striking contents. Or a message matches with a viewing habit. For instance, if viewers like to watch sitcoms, it is very likely that they will interrupt scanning once they recognize a program of that genre. Because viewers are familiar with the symbolic world of TV, the choice process can be shortened; recognition can lead directly to an evaluation of the program. *Systematic* evaluation is more elaborated and based on more complex aspects of the TV offer, like story line or reasoning. In both modes of evaluation, the interaction between viewer and TV message leads to an activation of schemata. A program will be selected if the viewer arrives at a positive evaluation or begins to actively examine a message. Once a program is selected, systematic evaluation may continue. The reception will be interrupted if the program is neither positively evaluated nor actively examined.

This sounds very rational. But of course not all elements of TV viewing and program choice can be explained as rational behavior. Bilandzic (1999) also mentions other viewing modes: Scanning periods, for instance, can also serve for an unspecific orientation – especially, if all available programs are included (*flipping*). Finally, watching TV does not necessarily mean that undivided attention is paid to the screen. Sometimes a viewer is preoccupied with other things and hardly recognizes what is going on.

Modeling Sequences of Viewing

What are the main gaps in the description of viewing behavior by the previous models, and how can they be improved? By specifying a list of determinants and assuming relations between them, choice models create the impression that program choice proceeds in an almost mechanical manner. However, the relationships indicated so far are by no means exhaustive. Other relations can be imagined as well: for instance, individual needs and preferences might influence the mere awareness of the program offer. The program structure, in turn, might amplify a viewer's needs and preferences. Webster (2009) recently compared this interrelation of viewer preferences and the program structure with the duality of structure and agent in structuration theory.

For a more comprehensive model, we suggest to first integrate the different approaches to program choice by distinguishing different spheres of influence:

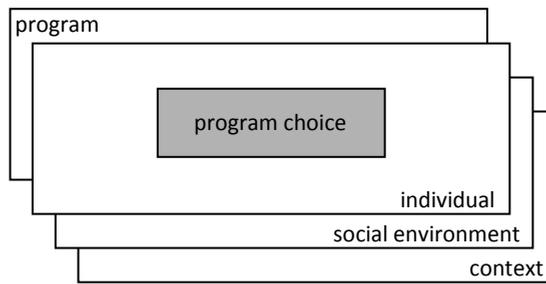


Figure 1.3 A Framework of Levels Influencing Program Choice.

individual factors, the social environment, and the program structure. But of course, impact on program choice does not stop at this point. Therefore, we also refer to context as an additional layer. The resulting framework (Figure 1.3) sharpens the distinction between different spheres of influence: program choice can be influenced by factors from all four levels.

Factors on the same level but also those from different levels are presumably interrelated. This implies a processual perspective. Although the process models have taken the dynamics of program choice into account, they have examined each choice separately from previous and subsequent viewing decisions. They do not account for the consecutive character of TV viewing. But prior choices also influence subsequent behavior. For instance, viewers might avoid a news program because they have already watched another outlet earlier this evening. Or others might seek for diversification after staying with a special interest channel for a while. Our own modeling of viewing behavior will, therefore, go one step further and look at whole viewing sessions.

A *viewing session* lasts from the moment a viewer starts watching TV until he or she stops viewing. To describe changing behavior during a session, the previous models can be combined and extended. The idea of the flowchart in Figure 1.4 is to model viewing sessions along possible activities of the viewer, such as evaluating a program, deciding whether to view this program or not, and switching to another channel. The primary goal of our model is to describe sequential-viewing activities. The model also accounts for the levels of influencing factors that we have learned as shaping viewing behavior.

The viewing process starts with the decision to view TV at all, followed by the first channel or program choice. These first decisions can be made on purpose but also indirectly, for instance, by entering a room where others are already watching. Content stemming from a specific program provides the input that is perceived

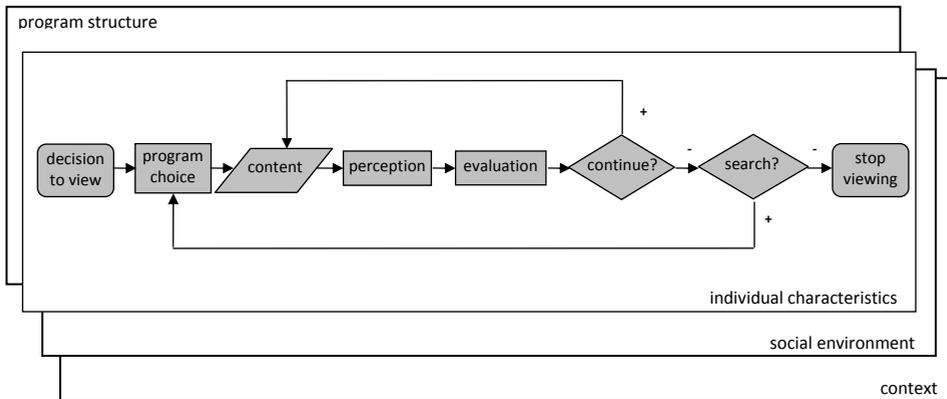


Figure 1.4 A Process Model of Sequential Viewing Patterns.

and evaluated by the viewer. Different modes of perception and evaluation are possible depending, for instance, on moods and motives of the viewer.

As suggested by Bilandzic (1999), during the first seconds of perception, only a heuristic evaluation of the program is possible, leading to the first decision whether to continue watching or not. If the viewer continues, a more systematic evaluation may be applied because more complex attributes of the program can be taken into account. However, it should not be misunderstood that the viewer necessarily evaluates the program all the time or consciously chooses whether to view further or to switch away. If a viewer is pleased with the fact that the TV is turned on or with the community of others, he or she may not consider switching at all.

Two loops describe the further sequential character of viewing. The first one originates from the decision to continue viewing a program, the second from the decision to search for another program. Through these loops, the model allows for different reception and search patterns as well as for all possible combinations of both. In the case of searching for a different program, for instance, the following patterns of search strategies are possible depending on underlying viewing motives (Bilandzic, 2004; van Meurs, 1999):

- The viewer switches to watch a program on a different channel.
- A longer searching period is followed with only heuristic evaluations (scanning). Maybe, the viewer even scans all available channels (flipping).
- The channels can be searched more slowly, including a systematic evaluation (grazing).

- A viewer switches to avoid certain content such as a commercial break and switches back after a while (zapping).
- A viewer is interested in two or more programs and keeps on switching back and forth (hopping).

Each action mentioned by the model can be described by subactivities. Switching, for instance, contains more decisions, such as which channel to choose next, whether to search in a numerical or in another purposive or nonpurposive order, or whether to consult a program guide in between or not. Therefore, submodels for each activity can be imagined dependent on the focus of the research.

But is watching TV as we describe it here not completely outdated already? A growing number of viewers use digital video recorders to record programs and watch them whenever it suits their schedule (Bernoff, 2004). Also viewing online becomes more and more popular. However, it does not seem to replace traditional forms of watching TV (Engel & Müller, 2008; Stipp, 2004). Exposure to prescheduled programming, still, is by far the most common way of watching TV (Marsden & Ariño, 2005; Stichting KijkOnderzoek [SKO], 2008). Especially, habits of viewing to relax and simply enjoy entertainment programs in a row seem to change only marginally (Gleich, 2008).

But of course, the structure of the program offer is about to change considerably. Services that record programs on the basis of individual preferences and previous choice behavior, for instance, provide a highly personalized offer. This is why these services are a good example for interactions between the program offer and viewer preferences. But in spite of such a personalized filter, viewers still make viewing decisions and selections from a pre-selection especially made for them.

Or interactive television, as a second example of digital TV, enables the viewer to combine viewing with other activities, such as searching for additional information, participating in a game, or choosing between different continuations of a narrative. Interacting with the program offer can be regarded as a different quality or mode of viewing that, certainly, influences the evaluation of a program and, therewith, whole patterns of viewing sequences.

Watching TV programs online constitutes a further viewing mode with, again, specific possibilities for program choice: viewers can choose to watch whatever programs they like and view them whenever they like. Often, digitalization is anticipated as making viewers sovereign navigators, independent of every program schedule. Our framework could help test this assumption: patterns of viewing

sequences should change when viewers can become more selective in their viewing choices.

The model offers different possibilities to describe viewing sessions. To guide explorative research it has to be further specified based on a specific research question. If the focus of interest, for instance, lies on selective exposure, sessions can be partitioned into intervals between switching. A channel interval would then last as long as a viewer stays with one channel (see Hasebrink & Krotz, 1993). Subsequent channel intervals constitute longer viewing sequences. The perspective of sequential viewing patterns opens the field for another type of research questions: How do viewing decisions change over the course of a viewing session? As indicated before, relations to possible influencing factors and the relations between them are multifaceted. Our framework encourages looking, especially, at dynamic influences during viewing sessions: Is program choice, for instance, at the beginning of a session influenced by the same factors as choices at later moments? Or how do search patterns differ over the course of a session?

Summing up, our model of sequential-viewing patterns suggests a more comprehensive perspective on individual TV viewing behavior. What types of programs viewers choose and how they reach this decision is not considered as isolated but in the context of whole viewing sessions. We argue that watching TV is mostly a consecutive behavior and that the duration and temporal order of viewing plays a crucial role: How a viewer evaluates a program offer is influenced by his or her prior choices. Therefore, we propose to look for typical patterns that describe viewing behavior between the decisions to start and to stop watching TV. Especially, with the emergence of new forms of viewing it may become even more relevant to investigate whole viewing situations. That way, different viewing modes can be compared and possible chances studied.

Empirical Evidence on Influential Factors

So far, our model building has been guided by previous models on individual viewing behavior that attempted to integrate the individual and the structural approach on audience behavior. Interestingly, compared to models of viewing behavior, empirical studies on the same subject have considered a much broader variety of predictors than the models, albeit often on an ad hoc basis. Therefore, we will now look at previous research to specify the framework of our model: Which individual, social, program-related, and contextual factors have been found to influence viewing behavior besides the ones we already encountered in models?

The following overview also presents the type of relations that have been found between our four spheres of influence and elements of the sequential-viewing process.

Individual Factors

Many viewing patterns show differences due to sociodemographics. So, variations in the frequency and the duration of viewing but also the amount of switching as well as the choice for specific program types are related to age, gender, education, income, and social class (Bilandzic & Rössler, 2004; Comstock & Scharrer, 1999; Hasebrink & Krotz, 1996; Rubin, 1984; Vierkant, 1987). The reasons why people start viewing at all and which programs they select differ individually according to one's motives and the perceived functionality of TV. Gratifications sought can be categorized, for instance, into *escape*, i.e., affective needs such as enjoyment and passing time; *surveillance*, which describes integrative needs such as self-identification and social comparison; and *seeking of information*, which includes the need to be aware of ongoing events and developments as well as the need to keep up with TV as media offer (Comstock & Scharrer, 1999).

The decision to view TV and the choice of a program can also follow the rather unconscious need to alter one's level of arousal in order to avoid being under- or overaroused (mood management theory, e.g., Zillmann & Bryant, 1985). Empirical evidence suggests that different mood states have different effects on viewing at all or on the selection of specific genres interacting with personality factors (e.g., Anderson, Collins, Schmitt, & Jacobvitz, 1996; Christ & Medorff, 1984; Mares & Cantor, 1992; Meadowcroft & Zillman, 1987).

In general, many situations of everyday life, such as work and other obligations, also influence how much viewing time is available to a viewer (Comstock & Scharrer, 1999; Gensch & Shaman, 1980; Westerik, Renckstorf, Wester, & Lammers, 2005). Since viewing behavior is highly habitual (Rosenstein & Grant, 1997), it is not surprising that past viewing behavior and program choices have often been found to be strong predictors of the present one (e.g., Barwise, Ehrenberg, & Goodhardt, 1982; Klövekorn, 2002). The same is true for self-reported interests in program types and for general attitudes towards TV (Espe & Seiwert, 1986; McDonald & Reese, 1987; Rubin, 1984). Other viewing-related factors investigated are the impact of remote control devices (RCD) and TV-guide use on switching behavior (Kaye & Sapolsky, 1997; Ottler, 1998; Van Meurs, 1999) or the use of interactive TV guides (Kang, 2002).

Program-Related Factors

The program offer, the available channels and their characteristics, and the media system as a whole are, of course, inevitable antecedents of individual viewing behavior (Heeter, D'Alessio, Greenberg, & McVoy, 1988; Prior, 2007; Youn, 1994). The number of available program alternatives influences how briefly viewers may stay with one channel (Hasebrink & Krotz, 1993; Heeter, 1985). Genre and program length contribute to more or less switching, i.e., each genre has a specific *stick value* (Ottler, 1998). But also the types of programs on competing channels are a decisive factor (Klövekorn, 2002). Also, the effects of commercial breaks on switching rates are well investigated and how that depends on factors as time of the day, placement of a break, or adjacent programs (Ottler, 1998; Siddarth & Chattopadhyay, 1998; Van Meurs, 1999). In general, viewers switch more often at the beginning or end of a program or at the beginning of subparts (such as scenes) within a program. Switching is encouraged by clear forms of separation, such as symbols that indicate a new segment, by the announcements that a program will end, or by a decreasing tension during shows or detective stories (Bilandzic, 2004; Eastman, Newton, & Riggs, 1997; Peek, 2002).

The nature of the factors mentioned so far suggests that most of them are interrelated. Viewers, for instance, respond to the program offer with cognitive or affective involvement (Perse, 1998) or base their program choices and evaluations on their genre preferences (Hawkins et al., 2001; Klövekorn, 2002). Genre preferences, in turn, often stem from other interests or personality traits (Espe & Seiwert, 1986; Shim & Paul, 2007; Weaver, Brosius, & Mundorf, 1993). But also content-related attributes interact with personal characteristics – for instance, if viewers select programs such that the protagonists are similar to their own demographic characteristics (Harwood, 1997; Shachar & Emerson, 2000).

From a structural perspective, studies look at influences of programming *strategies*. Research in this area is interested primarily in audience duplication, i.e., the overlap of the audiences of two programs. Patterns subsumed under audience duplication are: inheritance or lead-in effect, channel loyalty, repeat viewing, and repeated exposure (e.g., Cooper, 1993; Cooper, 1996; Goodhardt, Ehrenberg, & Collins, 1987; Rust & Alpert, 1984; Webster & Phalen, 1997). This research delivers valuable insights in viewing behavior because it accounts for impacts of specific program offers and channels for program choice but does so also for habitual-viewing behavior.

Social Environment

Program schedules and, thereby, viewing patterns are also influenced by events, such as sports competitions, political elections, catastrophes, etc. This is closely linked to TV's social functions – not only to keep people up with developments in society but also to provide information for conversations with one's family, friends, or colleagues (e.g., Comstock & Scharrer, 1999). Also whether someone starts or stops watching can be due to factors of one's social environment, such as activities of one's partner, children, or guests (Westerik et al., 2005). Social viewing seems to lead to less consistent program choices than solitary viewing (Webster & Wakshlag, 1982) and to a lower amount of switching (Hasebrink & Krotz, 1993; Van Meurs, 1999). However, there are mixed findings on how, for instance, families negotiate program choices and who is most dominant in taking viewing decisions (e.g., McDonald, 1986; Meier & Frissen, 1988; Morley, 1986). Certainly, viewing habits of parents and their attitudes have an impact on viewing behavior of children (e.g., Bower, 1973; Tasche, 1996). Finally, there seems to be a more general influence of culture as well. Weaver et al. (1993) found differences in the influence of personality types on movie preferences between American and German viewers.

Context of Viewing

Studies on aggregated audience behavior could identify further contextual variables. Mainly season and weather, day and time of day make a difference in who watches TV (e.g., Barwise et al., 1982; Gensch & Shaman, 1980; Kuchenbuch & Auer, 2006). Of course, these factors interrelate with or might be even explained by factors of the other three spheres of influence, for instance, with the seasonality of program schedules or of outdoor activities (Gensch & Shaman, 1980).

Our overview of studies on TV-viewing behavior reveals that there is a much broader variety of influence factors than models of program choice and search patterns have suggested so far. Table 1.1 shows all possible influence factors derived from models of watching television and empirical results. We distinguish between different sources of influences and time dimensions. Each of the four categories of influences contains long-term or structural factors as well as short-term or situational ones. Some of them may have short-term as well as long-term effects.

Table 1.1 Factors Influencing TV Viewing

	Long-term factors	Short-term factors
Individual	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sociodemographics • Personality, lifestyle, interests, knowledge • Occupation: duties, work, social engagement • Needs (for orientation, social integration, escapism, etc.) • Media use (media repertoire) • General attitudes towards TV • TV-viewing habits: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Light vs. heavy viewing ◦ Interest and preferences for channels, genres, and specific programs ◦ Search opportunities: TV guide, teletext, RCD ◦ Gratifications sought/obtained 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Availability, other activities • Moods (boredom, stress, etc.) • Needs/gratifications sought and obtained • Awareness of program offer • Interest in specific programs • Use of RCD, TV guide, teletext • Cognitive and affective involvement (attention, creation of meaning, para-social interaction, etc.)
Program structure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Media system (e.g., channel characteristics) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Program offer, genres • Program aspects: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ◦ Series, follow-up programs ◦ Content attributes (e.g., demographics of casts) ◦ Format/presentation (pacing, story length) • Programming strategies: sequences programs (lead in, sandwiching, etc.) • Programming strategies: competing programs (countering, blunting, etc.) • Commercial breaks (amount, length, placement, type) • Announcements, trailers, logos
Social	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social environment: other people of a household and further social contacts, social support for watching TV • Societal aspects: culture, status of TV, channel/program popularity 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Social environment: activities of other people in a household, guests, conversations about TV or specific programs • Societal aspects: events (e.g., the Olympic Games)
Context	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Season 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Weather, day, time

Towards Investigating Sequential Viewing Patterns: A Research Program

The models and studies reviewed here have revealed a detailed picture of individual TV-viewing patterns, program choice, and switching behaviors as well as of the factors influencing them – stemming from programming, the viewers, their social environment, and the broader context. Viewing is obviously influenced by long-term and situational factors interacting with each other. Based on previous research and with the help of modern statistical techniques and computer facilities, research now can go one step further and investigate the dynamics of viewing. We will, therefore, conclude this article with a brief outline of our research plans for a sequential observation of viewing patterns. For that purpose, people-meter data of Dutch television viewers are available from 1996 to the present. These data are the property of the Dutch Audience Research Foundation (SKO) since 2002 and are made available with the help of Netherlands Public Broadcasting (NPO).

Because people-meter data are recorded electronically, they precisely reflect switching behavior as well as the channels and programs viewed. In addition, they contain characteristics of the viewers, their social environment, and the program offers. We will analyze these data on the individual level to track comprehensive viewing sequences.

Our process model of sequential-viewing patterns suggests new questions for viewing behavior. For instance, we already know that viewers tend to switch more often at the beginning and end of viewing sessions (Bilandzic, 2004; Ottler, 1998). But how do switching patterns develop over the course of whole viewing sessions? Investigating the sequences of channels watched is supposed to reveal regularities of switching patterns throughout viewing sessions – for instance, regular patterns of alternating periods of searching, grazing, and viewing.

Once explored, these patterns will form the basis for a detailed viewer typology. Which viewers, in particular, enjoy the “reliable surprise” of a professionally preselected and structured programming (Schoenbach, 2007) and, therefore, may stay longer with just one channel than others? Who are the sensation seekers needing to boost their arousal by looking for “real”, i.e., non-predictable surprises on different channels in brief periods of time? Who are the strategic zappers avoiding commercial breaks, and who are the hoppers following several programs at the same time?

Also, the relevance of specific influence factors during viewing sessions will be investigated. Is there a shift of influential factors during a session? Do channel or genre preferences also influence the choice whether to view the next program

on the same channel or to switch away if the subsequent program does not match one's preferences? Or are genre preferences more influential at the beginning of a viewing session than at later moments?

Besides factors fairly constant over time, such as personal characteristics and preferences, we will account for possible determinants of watching TV that vary throughout viewing sessions. This offers the opportunity, for instance, to investigate the influence of social viewing in more detail: If other people attend or stop watching, do viewers change their switching behavior and patterns of program choice? A second factor varying over time is, of course, the program offer and, particularly, competing programs on other channels.

Sequential viewing patterns not only describe how people deal with program offers and spend their viewing time – certainly interesting for programming planners and advertisers. Comparing viewer groups will also allow us to make inferences about the relevance and meaning of TV in people's everyday lives. We will shed more light on differences that are related to social class, lifestyle, or attitudes. If there really is a fragmented or polarized audience, is this perhaps due to different functions of TV in people's lives?

The data available for our analysis offer a promising basis to answer the questions outlined above. Certainly, analyzing sequential-viewing patterns will be a challenge for the study of individual viewing data. But models and empirical evidence have indicated that there is plenty of additional benefit to be achieved by investigating the dynamics of individual viewing patterns.

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