TV strikes back: rise of digital devices drives new viewing habits

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- Three-quarters of internet users globally still watch TV daily
- Almost half of TV viewers are 'screen-stacking' in the evening
- A quarter now watch online video daily on a digital device

Adults around the world remain hooked on TV but the consumption habits of content-hungry viewers are changing rapidly, according to global research consultancy, TNS. While our love affair with television endures, TV sets alone are no longer enough to satisfy our appetite for content, driving the growth of online media and 'screen-stacking' as a result.

In Connected Life, a study of over 55,000 internet users worldwide, TNS found that almost half of people (48%) who watch TV in the evening simultaneously engage in other digital activities, such as using social media, checking their emails or shopping online. In South Africa, the picture is slightly different, with almost nine out of ten metro internet users watching TV daily, but with very few doing 'screen-stacking'.

The survey found that we own approximately four digital devices each, rising to five among Australian, German and UK respondents. This, combined with the demand for TV and video content on-the-go, is fuelling the rise of multi-screening or 'screen-stacking' - the use of multiple digital devices at the same time. Again, in South Africa, a lower average standard of living is limiting device ownership to 1.9 devices, with only higher income earners able to afford multiple devices (2.3 among those households earning R12,000 or more per month). Lower device ownership, coupled with low access to affordable data, means we are behind the global trends in multi-device use, limiting the opportunities for marketers to exploit new channels for interacting more directly with customers.

Globally, the demand for live and on-the-go content was amplified during the FIFA World Cup in recent weeks. Viewers were accessing this international sporting event via multiple devices at home and on the move, while also engaging in conversations on social media platforms.

The desire to access our favourite TV shows at all hours of the day is also driving online TV usage, which extends our access to them. One-quarter (25%) of those surveyed worldwide watch content on a PC, laptop, tablet or mobile daily. This rises to one-third (33%) in mainland China and Singapore and 32% in Hong Kong, where 'phablets' are increasingly popular. In South Africa, this is below the global average with only around 9% watching content on a mobile device daily, despite the fact that smartphone penetration is higher than the global average (with four out of five South African internet users claiming to have a smartphone). This lack of video utilisation is primarily due to limitations on data usage, with most mobile internet users using mobile data, which can get expensive quickly. Only 7.7% of SA metro internet users have fixed line internet in the home and only 2.8% have WiFi.

With affordable and universal access comes individual choice and in Hong Kong, more people actually choose to watch TV and video online rather than on traditional sets. After dinner, one-quarter of people (26%) tune into content on their digital devices, in contrast to 14% who switch on their TVs.

Yet despite this surge in online consumption, traditional TV sets still play a huge part in our lives, with three-quarters of respondents (75%) sitting in front of the box every day. TV dinners are also alive and well, with three out of four viewers (76%) giving TV their undivided attention while eating in the evening.

Many of the big global media companies are already taking advantage of growing online viewing trends, offering on-demand services such as BBC iPlayer, Hulu or HBO GO, which allow people to access premium content wherever they are through their phones or tablets.

Commenting on the findings, Matthew Froggatt, Chief Development Officer at TNS, said:

"In a world where multi-tasking is the norm, the context in which we watch TV is rapidly changing - it isn't just on the sofa at home with no other digital distractions around us. Instead, the growth in 'screen-stacking' and online TV viewing is huge, particularly in the Asian markets, driven by a growing demand for content among viewers.

"While there is no disputing that our love of traditional TV remains, advertisers must continue to adapt to our changing viewing habits. Online devices are offering more ways to access TV and video content, meaning that brands will need to adopt a more integrated online approach in order to engage consumers.

"However, many people around the world are still wedded to their TV sets, particularly when they are with their families and friends. Our ongoing love affair with TV has been supported by the rise in digital set-top boxes, catch-up TV and on-demand services such as Sky+ and Virgin TV Anywhere."

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