

MDI ALERT

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TV PLATFORM VIEWING BY AGE: DON'T BE MISLED BY THE STATS

Linear TV has seen its frequency of viewing among teens, kids and very young adults decline significantly over the past decade and streaming has benefitted most from this shift in platform usage. A Nielsen analysis of how various age groups allocate their TV set usage by age demonstrates this point most clearly. In August 2023, Nielsen's national peoplemeter panel noted that persons aged 2+ spent 20% of their TV viewing time with broadcast content, 30% with cable, 38% with streaming and 11% with "other" content (mostly video games). While that was Nielsen's overall finding, the accompanying table provides breakdowns by age which reveal huge differences by platform. For example, only 6% of children's viewing went to broadcast TV and 11% to cable, whereas streaming got 63% and "other" 20%. A similar distribution of time was evident for teens and young adults. As for older adults 50+, they remained loyal to traditional TV—both broadcast (about 30%) and cable (about 40%).

TV HOME RESIDENTS' SHARE OF VIEWING BY PLATFORM				
August 2023				
	Broadcast	Cable	Streaming	Other
All Persons 2+	20%	30%	38%	11%
By Age				
2-11	6	11	63	20
12-17	5	10	58	27
18-24	6	13	60	21
25-34	7	15	60	18
35-49	13	25	49	13
50-64	26	36	32	6
65+	33	44	18	6

Note: Percentages may not add to 100 due to rounding.

Source: Nielsen.

So, is it simply a case of, “linear is where you reach mostly old people and streaming is where you reach mostly young people”? Not really. The problem with this assumption is that it does not take into account the amount of time that people in the various age groups devote to TV. For example, an average oldster (aged 65+), by virtue of being home far more often and having many more shows that target them, devotes nearly triple the time viewing than an average 18-

24-year-old. While it's true that a far higher share of this time is spent with linear TV content, it's also true that the actual number of hours and minutes per week that a typical 70-year-old consumer spends with streaming is just about equal to what is recorded for an average 24-year-old. Furthermore, as more and more oldsters join the streaming universe, they will soon become its heaviest viewing group, especially as much more linear content becomes part of streaming service libraries.

Also, more streaming services are featuring commercials, which older consumers seem more tolerant of. Small wonder that Nielsen has found that Netflix's audience is not particularly young or old; rather, it has an audience profile that closely resembles the total population's composition by age and other demos. Nielsen has also reported that a number of ad-supported streaming services have audience profiles that match those of traditional cable channels and certain broadcast networks, meaning that older viewers are already their dominant viewing group.

Another Nielsen tally, this time based on second quarter 2023 data, deals with the reach potential of streaming. According to its findings, TV in total—linear and streaming—attained a weekly reach of 88% while streaming alone garnered a 75% weekly reach. When this was broken down by age group, Nielsen determined that a typical reach level for kids, teens and 18-34s was about 74-76% while the highest reach of 83% was attained by the middle aged segment (adults aged 35-49). As for those in the 50-64 age group, they were exactly average in terms of weekly reach—75%—and those 65+ came in at 64%. So, once again, the viewing data reveals that streaming is not the exclusive preserve of young people and when we trend the data it becomes evident that older viewers are catching up quickly with their younger counterparts in streaming consumption.

As we keep saying, it's all “TV”. There are ways to target various segments of the population within each platform and the sensible media planner must evaluate those that seem most suited for each client. Generalities like “linear is old, streaming is young” don't cut it anymore.