

TELEVISION: WHAT DO AMERICANS REALLY DO ON SATURDAY NIGHT?

By Guy E. Lometti

It's an article of faith in the television industry that the viewing public has deserted traditional TV on Saturday night for VCR playback of rented motion pictures, or left television entirely for points unknown outside the home. The more strongly this belief is held by those making program decisions, the greater the likelihood they will abandon this evening — not wanting to risk their best properties. Results from a national survey, developed by ABC Social Research, shed some light on how Americans actually spend their time on Saturday nights.

The Study

Phone interviews were conducted with a probability sample of 1,008 adults and 299 teenagers 13 to 17 years old, during the period April 29 to May 1, 1990. Respondents were asked about their personal activities on one particular Saturday night, April 28, 1990, between 8 and 11 pm Eastern and Pacific

time (7 and 10 pm Central and Mountain time). For each hour, they were asked if they were watching television. If they weren't, they were queried as to what they were doing.

The Findings

Respondents' viewing activities varied as a function of age and time. The highest level of TV viewing occurred among older adults during the first two hours of prime time. (Table 1) The lowest level of viewing was reported by young adults during the first and last prime time hours. Watching a TV program far surpassed watching a tape on the VCR among all age groups. Only about 10% of the respondents indicated that they watched TV by themselves, except among older adults (here, those over 50) where about 25% said they viewed alone (Table 2).

The most striking finding is how large the Saturday night television audience actually is. We know from Nielsen's "persons using television" (PUT) data that Saturday viewing levels, compared to other nights, are relatively lower for most adults and teens. Still, in every age group, Saturday night viewing of regular television programming dwarfs every other leisure activity.

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Table 1

Saturday Night Television Viewing During Prime Time, By Age

	<u>8:00 - 9:00 pm</u>				<u>9:00 - 10:00 pm</u>			<u>10:00 - 11:00 pm</u>		
	<u>Kids*</u>									
	<u>6-12</u>	<u>Teens</u>	<u>18-49</u>	<u>50+</u>	<u>Teens</u>	<u>18-49</u>	<u>50+</u>	<u>Teens</u>	<u>18-49</u>	<u>50+</u>
	<u>%</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>%</u>	<u>%</u>
PROPORTION OF TOTAL WATCHING TV	51	48	57	42	47	46	57	41	39	48
Watched TV Program	38	39	53	32	35	37	53	32	31	46
Watched VCR	11	9	4	11	12	3	9	9	8	2

*Adults with children 6-12 years old were asked about their children's activities between 8:00 to 9:00 pm only.

Table 2
What People Do On Saturday Night

	<u>Data for 8-9 pm only, By Age</u>			
	<u>Kids</u> <u>6-12</u> %	<u>Teens</u> %	<u>18-49</u> %	<u>50+</u> %
TOTAL TV VIEWERS (NET)	51	48	42	57
Watched TV Program	38	39	32	53
Watched VCR	11	9	11	4
Rented Tape	6	9	8	3
Watched at home	46	36	39	55
Watched in someone else's home	4	11	3	1
Watched in some other place	1	0	1	1
Watched with spouse	0	0	23	20
Watched with kids less than 12	11	6	7	2
Watched with teens	5	3	2	1
Watched with parents	28	13	1	0
Watched with friends/relatives	13	7	23	20
Watched alone	3	11	9	26
NON-VIEWERS (NET)	49	52	58	43
Out-of-Home (Net)	18	37	37	22
Social/Sports Events	10	26	24	15
Visit Friends/Family	6	9	5	3
Work	0	3	6	2
Travel to/from Destination	1	2	3	2
Shopping or Errands	1	3	2	1
In-Home (NET)	24	15	21	20
Work (Chores, Homework, etc.)	0	4	5	3
Eat (Dinner)	0	3	4	2
Sleep/Get ready for bed	9	1	3	4
Entertain Friends/Family	3	1	3	4
Read	3	1	1	5
Hobbies	5	1	1	2
Get Ready/Dressed to go out	0	2	1	1
Listen to Music	1	3	2	0
Childcare	0	1	1	0
Video Games	3	1	0	0
Other	3	3	3	2