Cable access television and the Las Vegas community: A study of Clark County viewers

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CABLE ACCESS TELEVISION AND THE LAS VEGAS COMMUNITY:
A STUDY OF CLARK COUNTY VIEWERS

by

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Bachelor of Science
University of Wisconsin, La Crosse
1985

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

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[Signatures of Examination Committee Members and Dean of the Graduate College]
ABSTRACT

Cable Television and the
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by

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This study examined the current audience for cable access television in one of the fastest growing markets in the western United States. Based on the limited number of studies revealing inconclusive audience attributes, unclear trends and viewing behaviors, this study is an exploratory venture. It continued the examination conducted by preceding research literature regarding cable access and tried to uncover the relevance of variables affecting cable access audiences. A telephone survey was administered to 500 respondents and assessed awareness and viewership of the local cable access channel; viewer sources of information leading to access viewership satisfaction with local cable access; and demographics. The study incorporated variables assessing the degree of local community involvement and made linkage to Diffusion of Innovation Theory (Rogers, 1995) and how it applied to the study based on the theory’s four critical elements including innovation, communication, the social system and cable access’ impact over time.
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Cable access television is a medium often misunderstood by the general public it serves. Many people do not know cable access television exists and assume it is just another form of broadcasting (Bretz, 1975). Cable access television programming is considered an alternative to traditional cable television (Briller, 1996). It is used by a variety of Americans, from the Red Cross to the Girl Scouts, to produce and air documentaries, reports by community activists, religious programming, gavel-to-gavel coverage of local governmental meetings and other community-oriented programs.

Cable access television's watchability (Doty, 1975) has been and continues to be constantly under attack from critics. These critics include some cable television operators who view cable access channels as space that could be used to generate revenues through advertising dollars instead of used for amateur programming. Doty (1975) suggests that for public access television to serve its public, it needs not only citizen programmers, but citizen viewers. "Unfortunately, most Americans know little about access channels and newspapers disparage them as unprofessional and little-watched" (Briller, 1996). This perception can be attributed to cable access television's non-commercial, community-
oriented status as an "electronic soapbox" (p. 51) serving as a democratic medium for the people.

Cable access channels are usually channels that have been reserved by local cable operators for programming by community members or organizations. There are two different kinds of access channels: 1) leased commercial access; and 2) non-commercial access. Leased commercial access includes access channels leased by cable operators for commercial programming. Non-commercial access includes channels typically operated and programmed by public, educational or government (PEG) institutions. PEG channels are usually free of charge and are available on a non-discriminatory basis. They provide programming content that is controlled by the public and public institutions instead of cable operators (Engelman, 1996). Community residents and organizations can use access channels to present their non-commercial messages to viewers on PEG channels. Channel time, equipment and training is typically provided to the public on a first-come, first-served basis.

Diffusion of Innovation Theory

One of society's most challenging struggles is with ideas that are diffused into everyday life and become part of cultural change (Rogers, 1995). Despite an individual or group's optimistic attitudes toward science and technology, there is a certain amount of lag time before an innovation is widely accepted into society. Diffusion of Innovation Theory can be applied to this study of cable access television in Las Vegas.

Four critical elements are key to the Diffusion of Innovation Theory: the innovation; its communication from one individual to another; the social system; and the
innovation's impact over time. Rogers (1995) defines innovation as an idea that an individual perceives to be new (p.11). The newness of the innovation determines a person's reaction to it. Innovations range from social movements, such as clothing styles, to technical and organizational innovations, such as cable access channels.

The second element is communication from one individual to another through the diffusion process. Diffusion is how an innovation spreads from its inception to adoption. Human interaction by word of mouth from one individual to another is one of the primary means by which the new idea is communicated (Rogers, 1995). The author defines a social system as a population of individuals who are trying to solve a problem together. Each member of the group can be distinguished as an individual but participates as part of the group because they have a common problem to solve.

There are two social systems in this particular study. First, there is the social system of individuals who constitute cable access in this community. Second, and most pertinent to the current study, is the social system made up of individuals who watch cable access television in Las Vegas, Nevada.

Adoption of a new idea within a social system is an individual choice, often influenced by a group, or a group decision. An individual may choose to adopt an innovation on their own despite what the others in the group decide. In group decisions, it often takes the entire community to adopt the new idea before individual adoption is possible. A group's decision to adopt a new idea imposes acceptance of that idea onto those individuals within the group who oppose the idea (Rogers, 1995).

There are five stages of the adoption process in Diffusion of Innovation Theory.
These are awareness, interest, evaluation, trial and adoption (Rogers, 1995). Individuals within a social system fit into one of five adopter categories including: innovators; early adopters; early majority; late majority; and laggards.

Diffusion of Innovation Theory is applicable to this study of cable access television. The innovation or new idea is cable access television. The current study examines how cable access television is communicated from one individual to another within its two social systems including, individuals who constitute cable access in the community and those who are actual viewers. Cable access television’s impact on Clark County residents is also measured.

Example Applications of Diffusion of Innovation Theory

LaBarbera and Reddy (1987) also used Diffusion of Innovation Theory to examine physician resistance to the adoption of advertising. Advertising was introduced as an innovative idea for physicians to adopt as part of their practice. The authors compared the attitudes of dermatologists and plastic surgeons about advertising their professional services. Questionnaires were mailed to dermatologists and plastic surgeons. The results demonstrated a resistance to adopting advertising by both groups of physicians. Physicians who stated that the costs of not using advertising could be high were likely to advertise. Both groups are concerned about competition.

Dermatologists believed that advertising their services improved patient care quality. Plastic surgeons believed advertising could cause gimmickry and negative public image of the medical profession. The authors found that despite the physicians’ skeptical attitudes toward advertising, consumers favored advertising among physicians to increase
competition (p.44).

Of the five adopter categories, both the dermatologists and plastic surgeons would be considered laggards, among the last to adopt the idea of advertising, in comparison to other types of physicians and other professions. These physicians followed the Diffusion of Innovation Theory stages of the adoption process. Each group of physicians first became aware of advertising, but the possibility of advertising their professional services did not occur to most American Medical Association (AMA) member physicians until after 1977 when the AMA lifted its code of ethics ban on physician advertising (p. 43). The ban was a self-regulated measure to protect consumers and to deter misrepresentation among physicians. In this study, the dermatologists were the most likely to continue through the evaluation, trial and eventually the adoption of advertising their services while the plastic surgeons were still not convinced that adoption of advertising would be appropriate for their profession.

Pandey and Yadama (1992) used Diffusion of Innovation Theory to explore a community development program in Nepal designed to introduce new technology to the rural poor and help improve their way of life. Improved cookstoves were distributed to 28 villages free of charge to ease the demand for wood fuel from the country's depleting forests. The program faced social, cultural and economic barriers to adoption of the cookstoves. The authors found that cultural compatibility and relative advantage are major factors for adoption of a new technology. They also discovered that the degree of a new technology’s complexity was not enough reason not to adopt it. An innovation’s characteristics impact an individual’s decision whether or not to adopt the innovation. In
this case, Nepal residents rejected the improved cookstoves following the trial stage of the diffusion of innovation process. The program was successful in distributing the stoves to a large number of people, but was not successful in promoting usage of the cookstoves on a long-term basis (p. 583).

Darley and Beniger (1981) suggested that an individual's decision to adopt energy-saving techniques is an example of the decision to adopt an innovation. They discovered that an individual's ideas of an innovation's characteristics impact their decision to adopt the innovation.

Low-cost loans and public service advertising are two methods that were used to convince people to conserve energy. The authors recommended that a better approach would be the diffusion of energy conservation information through personal networks. They believed adoption decisions about energy conservation are influenced by barriers including, uncertainty that the recommended energy-saving innovations will help save energy and money. Another barrier is that many users thought they were unable to install the devices and therefore could not see that the innovations actually do help conserve energy. To eliminate these barriers the authors suggested a change agent, referred to as a house doctor, to help homeowners install energy-saving innovations in their homes and at the same time diffuse information about energy conservation. The homeowners who installed the innovations first would be the innovators and their homes would serve as models to get the word out to their family and friends who would be possible second-stage innovators. Energy conserving innovations would be diffused through their social networks and people who normally wouldn't consider the innovations would be part of
the energy-conservation effort.

Cable Access: An Overview

The current study incorporates Diffusion of Innovation Theory to study the audience for cable access television in Las Vegas, Nevada. The theory and previous studies cited will provide general guidelines for posing research questions and interpreting results from survey data.

The idea of cable access television evolved from a series of federal communication laws that developed earlier in the century mandating American airwaves as valuable resources belonging to all people. Broadcasters who received the first licenses to broadcast on American radio, and later television airwaves, were granted with an agreement to serve in the public's best interest (Teeter & Le Duc, 1995).

Cable television was originally introduced in America during the 1940s to provide greater reception to rural areas. Twenty years later, during the 1960s, numerous factors contributed to the surge of cable access channels on American cable systems. Society's cry for freedom of expression for all people was one significant factor for the surge. Freedom of expression in evolving television media was a direct outgrowth of the 1960's when social change altered attitudes toward communication and the right to not only express but be heard by a mass of people (Blau, 1993).

Barron (1972) believed that public access to the media was an implied right under the First Amendment. He was also convinced that the public's voice was not being heard and that access television was the only public form of expression for many communities. Another factor was the demand for cable television in urban areas to provide viewers with
more programming choices. By the early 1970s, improvements in portable video
equipment and taping made it possible for the general public to become more involved in
video production at cable access stations throughout the country and to create their own
programming.

In 1972, Federal Communication Commission regulations required cable systems
in the 100 largest markets in the country to provide separate channels free for public,
educational, and government accesses. These channels came to be known as public access
channels or Public, Educational and Governmental (PEG) Access (Baldwin & McVoy,
1988). The 1972 mandate evolved based on viewers' frustrations that broadcasters were
not adequately providing a local voice for public citizens, the government and educational
systems based on their programming content. At the time, the majority of programming
was controlled by the cable operators and the general public had little direct input
regarding content. The mandate also restricted cable providers from censoring information
on public access channels.

The 1972 requirement was struck down in federal court by 1979 in the case of
FCC v. Midwest, 440 U.S. 689 (1979), when the U.S. Supreme Court determined that the
FCC could not require cable systems to offer public access channels. Engleman (1996)
believed this ruling forced many public access television channels to request assistance
from state and local governments.

The Cable Communications Act of 1984 (98 Stat. 2779, P.L. 98-549) outlined the
boundaries for today's relationship between cable providers and the public by addressing
both commercial and community concerns. The Act reinforced the FCC v. Midwest.
supra, decision that no longer required cable operators to offer space for public access. At the same time, the 1984 ruling did force cable operators to devote some space to community access on a leased basis and accept requests for PEG access. Actual carriage of these channels continued to be negotiable between local government, serving as franchise authorities, and the cable operators.

While the 1984 act stated “A franchise authority may establish requirements in a franchise with respect to designation or use of channel capacity for public, education or government use” (Baldwin & McVoy, 1988), the trend in offering cable access channels had already been established historically in some franchise agreements and city ordinances across the country. Atkin and LaRose (1991) credit the 1984 act for leading cable operators to lessen their commitment to PEG access. Usually located in college towns or larger television markets, about one in four cable systems now offer cable access television to subscribers today in the United States (Agostino & Eastman, 1989).

In 1990, at least 100 million Americans were served by cable television and in many American communities subscriptions to cable television surpassed the number of subscriptions to the daily newspaper. America’s reliance on cable television for information prompts a responsibility on the community’s behalf to offer cable access in order to provide a community outlet for local news and information. Cable television’s many channels and choices of programming have changed the way Americans watch television. Viewers are no longer loyal to network television with cable’s array of choices selected with a flick of the remote control (Nicholson, 1990).

By 1993, over 60 percent of American homes received television by cable with
access to approximately 50 channels including specialized programming (Nicholson, 1990). In 1996, there were an estimated 4,800 PEG channels in the United States (Briller, 1996). Yet, after three decades of survival, public, educational and government cable access television continues to conflict with cable operators who object to government mandates to furnish facilities and access. The future survival rate of these channels is predicted at 15% of all U.S. cable systems (Aufderheide, 1994, Atkin & LaRose, 1991).

History of Clark County and Prime Cable Franchise Agreement

Prime Community Cable Television, a Nevada corporation, has provided cable service to the Las Vegas metropolitan area since the late 1970's. Under a management agreement with Prime Management Group of Austin, Texas, Cable Television now doing business as Prime Cable, operates as part of a Las Vegas family’s media holdings.

In the Las Vegas metropolitan area, Prime Cable is franchised by five different jurisdictions including: Clark County and the cities of Las Vegas; North Las Vegas; Henderson; and Boulder City. These franchises, negotiated during the late 70s and early 80s, occurred during a time of significant investment in the cable television construction in the United States that was influenced by the development of satellite delivered programming services, such as HBO (Trainor, personal communication, January 14, 1997). These new services added to the consumers’ needs for deployment of cable technology in urban America.

The franchise inception and expiration dates include: Las Vegas, December 5, 1979, expiration, December 5, 1999; North Las Vegas, November 5, 1980, expiration, November 5, 2000; Clark County, July 21, 1981, expiration, July 21, 2001; Henderson,
August 13, 1981, expiration, August 13, 2001; and Boulder City, February 7, 1984, expiration, February 7, 2004. Of the five jurisdictions, only two, Clark County and Boulder City negotiated for access channels as part of their franchise agreement. The Henderson agreement established joint participation on Clark County’s channel when it became available.

Although the Cable Act of 1984, supra, could not be used to amend existing franchises, local governments across the country began to evaluate their existing policies to comply with the new direction of the federal law. In response to this new federal law, changes were adopted by local governments in Southern Nevada in the 1980s to bring local codes in line with federal mandates. Based on the Act, local municipalities in Southern Nevada now require the provision of at least one each of PEG access channels in a franchise. These provisions have not yet been realized in local franchises.

Based on the access concept, the City of Las Vegas and Clark County made arrangements with Prime Cable to provide coverage of government meetings. Under Clark County’s agreement with Prime Cable, Prime arranged to have the University of Nevada Las Vegas (UNLV) videotape the meetings of the Clark County Board of County Commissioners. Board meetings were replayed on UNLV-TV, Prime’s Channel 4, made available for university programming. In addition, the City of Las Vegas contracted directly with UNLV to videotape and replay their council meetings and to provide a weekly live news magazine program, programming also aired on UNLV-TV.

In 1995, Clark County renewed its interest in developing additional government access channel programming. The county had never insisted on the full activation of its
government access channel or had received the studio and production support under the terms of its franchise agreement (Trainor, personal communication, January 14, 1997). In February 1995, an agreement was signed between Prime Cable and Clark County stating that the county would share the channel Prime provided for UNLV-TV. Under additional terms of the agreement, Prime provided approximately $120,000 of video production equipment to the county in lieu of the studio and technical personnel called for in the 1981 franchise agreement (Trainor, personal communication, January 14, 1997).

The shared-use agreement was continued for a second year in 1996. During this time, five different sources were providing programming to this channel. Prime Cable offered CSPAN-2, which it preempted to make time available for programming from UNLV-TV, based on their contract from the City of Las Vegas and Clark County. Under its own agreement with the Clark County School District, Prime also preempted CSPAN-2 for Homework Hotline. Section 20 of the Clark County antenna television (CATV) franchise requires at least one channel and a studio and staff. Upon commencement of service, CATV agreed to provide one local orientation channel and necessary studio, equipment and technical personnel available to the county for lawful programming at no charge. If, during the term of this franchise, there is a need for more than one governmental channel, CATV agreed to provide such additional channel or channels to the county for governmental programming at no charge to the county (Trainor, personal communication, January 14, 1997).

Also in 1996, Clark County sought full activation of the government access channel as part of the original franchise agreement. The county sought to gain greater
control regarding the timing and scheduling of programming and technical operations of the channel requested Prime find a new channel for CSPAN-2. Clark County did not seek additional equipment, facilities or personnel. Through an inter-local agreement between the five jurisdictions served by Prime, which was approved by the Clark County Board of County Commissioners in 1997, each jurisdiction can receive time from the county on the county government access channel and the county continues to make time available for UNLV-TV programming.

Controlling interest of the system was sold to Cox Communications Inc., a leading multiple system operator, in May 1998 for $1.3 billion. A new master franchise agreement for Clark County, Las Vegas, Henderson, North Las Vegas and Boulder City will replace the existing separate franchise agreements and will include customer service requirements for the first time.
CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Scholarly literature on PEG is abundant with criticism suggesting that PEG has not been given a fair chance to thrive and faces difficult times ahead operating in the ever-changing electronic media market. Cable operators across the country are discussing the possibility of telephone companies and program suppliers becoming actively involved in a union of technology and programming with their industry. Based on this conflict and its non-commercial status, surveys of public access television audiences were not routinely conducted in the early years of public access television unless the surveys were funded by private organizations. Cable providers concentrated on audience surveys of commercial cable channels since these studies provided valuable information used to sell advertising dollars. The few studies that were conducted are outlined in chronological order to provide a historical overview of cable access audiences.

One of the earliest studies came two years after the FCC initially required cable systems to provide public access television channels. In 1974, the Indiana University Department of Telecommunications and Video Access Center (VAC) in Columbus, Indiana embarked on a two-phase study to evaluate the VAC's progress, future and to
compare it with other cable access outlets in the country (Johnson, Agostino, and Ksobiech, 1974). Researchers took into account the trends, issues and problems that public access channels were facing in the mid-seventies and related them to Columbus, Indiana.

Survey data were gathered from subscribers through telephone interviews, 200 randomly selected households television viewing diaries and 150 detailed questionnaire interviews. The viewing diary results showed only 5% of the viewers indicated they watched the community access station during the viewing period. Demographic assessments were not possible based on the small sub-sample. The results also revealed that VAC's facilities were superior in terms of staff, equipment, hours and funding compared to public access centers in larger markets. VAC's audience was minimal and undifferentiated. It was determined that VAC was not intended for mass appeal programming needs. VAC's future growth was dependent on generating community support.

In the second phase, Johnson et al. (1974) conducted a quantitative analysis of viewers in Columbus based on 200 telephone interviews to access their attitudes about television, cable access television and the reaction of Columbus viewers to VAC. The results show nearly 80% of the subscribers knew about their access channel and 45% said they had watched cable access programming.

Hardenbergh's (1986) study of four public access channels on cable television in Connecticut examined the audience, organization and content of each channel during a one week period to determine whether public access can be categorized and function as a
medium of small audience communication. Information was collected by interviewing producers from each of the four channels, observing each channel's programming content and by surveying the audience. Hardenbergh (1986) conducted a telephone survey of the four access channels serving seven neighboring towns. The results of more than 268 surveys concluded half of the participants had watched public access programming, but the other half rarely watched their local public access channel. It also revealed that cable television can serve as a source of both small audience and mass communication. In addition, audiences reflected they wanted to view non-traditional program content and they were also homogeneous based on geographical areas.

Porter and Banks (1988) measured awareness of and how viewers in Milwaukee, Wisconsin perceived public access television. The authors predicted that viewers with availability to public access were more aware and that awareness increased with greater exposure. A telephone survey of 226 randomly selected households revealed that 51% of households were aware of public television. Participants who lived in cities where cable was available for a long period of time were more aware of public access than participants in areas where cable was fairly new. Participants who had completed higher education had a greater awareness of public access. Gender or age proved not to be a factor in degrees of awareness.

Atkin and LaRose (1991) surveyed 100 cable subscribers selected from various regional areas of the United States drawing more than 1,300 responses regarding viewship and satisfaction. The results concluded that almost 60% of all homes receiving cable had access to at least one community access channel and 16% of viewers stated they
had watched an access during the week of the survey. More than 25% were satisfied with the programming content found on these access channels and 20% were not satisfied. Viewership demographics revealed that gender was not a factor. Persons age 65 and older watched more television than other age groups and people with more education watched more community access television. Community access station KACT-TV in Aurora, Colorado surveyed its viewers in 1994 by mailing more than 51,000 surveys to households along with the cable company’s monthly bill. Of the nearly 2,000 surveys that were returned, 70% of the viewers indicated they had watched the Aurora’s community access channel at least once a month. Local news and public affairs programming was watched the most and 74% of these households included one or more persons who voted in local elections (KACT-TV, 1994).

In another survey, Etrok Telecommunications (1995) was contracted by the City of Santa Barbara, California to gauge the attitudes and opinions about the city’s government access channel, CityTV. Based on 384 telephone interviews, the results showed 40% of cable subscribers were familiar with the channel and could name it. Another 40% of those surveyed indicated they watched the government access channel once a month.

Summary of Previous Research

The few studies that examined cable access audiences’ awareness and viewership patterns in community or public access television, including one government access channel, revealed scattered trends. At the same time, these studies provide valuable information about audiences during the past 20 years to guide further research. Audience
awareness and viewership patterns were not consistent among cable systems in markets across the country. Awareness of cable among the viewers ranged from less than half to nearly three-fourths and viewership measured from 5% to more than 70%. Demographics suggest cable access viewers prefer programming about community and public affairs, viewers with higher education tend to watch access programming. Overall, the small sample sizes in these audiences surveys make analysis of individual viewer traits a challenge.
CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study is to examine the current audience for cable access television in one of the fastest growing markets in the western United States. Based on the limited number of studies revealing inconclusive audience attributes, unclear trends and viewing behaviors, this study is an exploratory venture.

This study continues the examination previously conducted and reported in the pertinent research literature regarding cable access and tries to uncover the relevance of variables affecting cable access audiences. These variables include: awareness and viewership of the local cable access channel; viewer sources of information leading to access viewership satisfaction with local cable access; and demographics. The study also incorporated variables assessing degree of local community involvement. It made linkages to the Diffusion of Innovation Theory (Rogers, 1995) and how it applies to the study based on the theory’s four critical elements including an innovation, communication between individuals, the social system and its impact over time.

Cable market analyzed. The current study analyzed the Las Vegas metropolitan area, including the cities of Las Vegas, North Las Vegas and Henderson.
**Sampling.** The sample scope included households served by the area cable system. Survey sampling Inc., a commercial survey-research firm, determined telephone prefixes for the Las Vegas metropolitan area and eliminated prefixes outside the coverage area. A starting survey sample of 3,500 was generated on the following criteria: the estimated percentage of households in the survey area, estimated survey sensitivity and rejection rate after making contact with a potential respondent. Survey Sampling Inc., eliminated disconnected telephone numbers, which cut the starting sample size to 3,039. A predetermined sample size of 500 interviews was agreed upon to provide a suitable number of sub-sample access viewers. This size was also determined based on the percentage of viewers used in earlier studies. A total of 2,562 telephone calls were made between June 6 and June 20, 1997, by four graduate students trained in survey administration techniques for this particular study. A total of 500 interviews were completed. Each telephone number was called not more than three times.

**Questionnaire.** A three-page interviewer-administered survey was developed for the survey. (See Appendix I). It was divided into five sections: introductory qualifiers recording the participant's age, number of working household television sets, cable or non-cable status, cable provider for subscribers; sources of information used to decide what to watch on television; status of access viewership, access programming choices and demographics. Ordinal-type scales were used in some sections to best accommodate telephone interviewing. The office of the manager of regional telecommunications for Clark County, Las Vegas and the director of UNLV-TV assisted with the survey design. A preliminary survey draft was used to conduct a telephone survey pretest of 40
participants, which included people who were known viewers of the access channel.

Analysis Plan

The data generated from this survey will be largely nominal and ordinal in nature, with only two variables representing interval data. The primary dependent variable will be viewers and non viewers of Prime Cable’s Channel 4, the Clark County Government Access Channel/UNLV-TV. The analysis plan will proceed from descriptions of nominal and ordinal data characterizing the larger group of individuals responding to the survey as well as descriptions of public access viewers. Two-group tests will also be incorporated to test differences between the two groups generated from the primary dependent variable classifying whether or not a respondent views access programming. Chi Square statistical analysis will be incorporated for these two-group tests as the primary dependent variable represents ordinal data. Analysis incorporating t-test statistics will be used in the case of the two interval-data.
CHAPTER 4

RESULTS

Overview: Cable Viewership

Results show that 76.3% of respondents subscribe to cable television in Clark County, Nevada with 72.4% of all cable television subscribers receiving their service from Prime Cable. Thirty-four percent of respondents have at least two television sets. This percentage is approximately 10 percent higher than penetration figures provided by Nielsen Media Research and can be attributed to exclusive sampling of households with telephone prefixes served by Prime Cable, Inc. When asked to provide an overall rating of their cable provider, 51.3% answered good and 12.2% answered excellent. In addition, 29.2% said their provider was fair and 6.3% said poor.

Television Viewership Profiles

The average number of televisions sets per household was 2.8. Respondents were read a list of sources they might use to decide what to watch on television. A Sunday newspaper television guide was sometimes or always used by 42.8% of the respondents, while 40.6 said they never used the Sunday guide. A local newspaper program listing was
never or rarely used by 83.2% of the respondents.

Only 15.6% of respondents said they sometimes or always used *TV Guide* magazine, while 49.4% sometimes or always used Prime Cable’s viewing guide. Just turning on the TV set and seeing what was on was sometimes or always a source for 78.2% of the respondents. The monthly cable guide was sometimes or always used by 49.4% of viewers. Most viewers, 83.2%, said they sometimes or always just know what is on at certain times of the day. Many viewers, 60.6%, said they never or rarely relied on family or friends to find out what to watch on television.

Of those respondents who were surveyed, 29.9%, were between the ages of 35-49 and 55.7% of all respondents were females. More than half of both the men and women, 53.2%, have lived in Clark County for ten years or less, with 78.4% stating it was unlikely that they would move from the area within the next one to two years. The majority of respondents, 68.9%, owned their current residence, while 31.1% rented. Additionally, 60.6% of respondents completed high school and some college.

All respondents indicated that they sometimes or always voted in local elections. Only 17.4% said they sometimes or always get involved in local politics. Nearly half of the respondents, 49%, keep up with current events in the community and 38.6% sometimes or always said they do community volunteer work. More than 66% of respondents pay attention to local television news stories about the community and 78.8% said they sometimes or always read articles in the newspaper dealing with community issues. Results also showed that access viewers had lived in Clark County about two years longer than non-viewers.
Channel 4 Access Viewers and Non Viewers

More than one quarter of all respondents, 28%, remembered watching programming or programs on the local cable access Channel 4 with aided or unaided recall from the interviewer. When aided, another 8% of all respondents remembered watching programming or programs. The two groups combined into one group to form a group of respondents who had watched access programming, or 36% of all respondents. The responses of this overall group were compared to respondents who said they did not remember watching programming or programs on cable. A variety of key variables were examined. Chi square was used in most instances since the independent variable was nominal and most of the dependent variables were ordinal. A test of means was used with two variables comprised of interval data.

Demographics

There were significant differences among viewers and non-viewers in terms of age $X^2(4, N=499) = 11.41, p<.05$. Respondents between the ages of 18 to 24 years of age were less likely to watch access television. There were no significant differences between viewers and non-viewers regarding gender or educational level. The difference approached significance in a test of means that revealed access viewers tended to live in Clark County about two years longer than non viewers. Yet, respondents who said they were likely to move out of the Las Vegas area within the next one to two years were not as often access viewers $X^2(2, N=500) = 16.91, p<.001$. Respondents who stated they were somewhat likely to move out of Las Vegas were often access viewers.
There was no significant difference between access viewers and non-viewers in the type of housing. Viewership was not impacted by whether the respondents lived in a house, apartment or condominium or mobile home. The difference between viewers and non-viewers regarding renters and owners approached significance with renters more often being non-access viewers.

Community Participation

Based on the results from the review of literature for this study, it is suggested that the extent of a person’s commitment to the community can be an indicator of local cable access program viewing. There was a difference in how often viewers and non-viewers voted in local elections $X^2(3, N=500) = 10.32, p<.05$. Viewers of access were more likely to vote in local elections and non-viewers were more likely to rarely or never vote. In terms of involvement in local politics, access viewers were more likely to get involved than non-viewers $X^2(3, N=500) = 13.14, p<.05$.

The survey included a series of questions intended to determine the respondent’s awareness of community news and events. There was a significant difference among access viewers and non-viewers and the degree that they monitor community current events $X^2(3, N=500) = 10.97, p<.05$. There were more non-viewers who indicated that they rarely or never kept up with current events compared to access viewers. No differences were found between the two groups of respondents regarding their degree of paying attention to stories about the community on the local television news or in their readership of stories in the local newspapers. Results regarding respondents’ tendency to volunteer in the community suggested that there is a possibility of differences among
viewers and non-viewers. More non-viewers indicated that they were unlikely to
volunteer, but the difference was not significant.

Cable Access Viewers-Program Preferences

Access viewers indicated that they had developed programming preferences
through regular viewing. Local governmental meetings including, the Las Vegas City
Council and the Board of County Commissioners meetings, were watched most often. Of
all access viewers, 48.3%, said they sometimes or always watch taped coverage of the city
council meetings and 40.7% of all access viewers said they sometimes or always watch
coverage of the board of county commissioners meetings. The mayor's live call-in show
was sometimes or always viewed by 20.9% of access viewers. Local government news
magazine shows were sometimes or always watched by 39.6% of access viewers.

Other programming categories were watched among smaller percentages of access
viewers. Programs produced by UNLV were sometimes or always watched by 24.1% of
access viewers. The Clark County Public School District's Homework Hotline was
sometimes or always watched by 19.2% of access viewers. Shows about Las Vegas' McCarren International Airport were sometimes or always viewed by 17.0% of access
viewers.

A majority of all access viewers, 90.1%, felt this type of access programming on
Prime Cable Channel 4 was useful. Nearly 60%, 59.3%, of respondents felt there was an
adequate amount of access programming on the channel, 29.7% wanted to see more
programming and only 11% wanted to see less.
Access viewers were compared to non access viewers and their satisfaction with the local cable television provider. There were no significant differences between these two groups and their satisfaction levels.
CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS

This study explored awareness and viewership of the local cable access channel, viewer sources of information leading to access viewership, satisfaction with local cable access, and demographics. The study also incorporated variables assessing the respondents’ degree of local community involvement and made linkages to Rogers’ (1995) Diffusion of Innovation Theory, including the theory’s four critical elements; innovation, communication between individuals, the social system, and its impact over time. It also explored the study’s implications for further research.

Cable Access Viewers

Questions in the survey that were designed to determine community involvement helped from a profile of the access viewers who were watching the channel. These access viewers responses suggest they were more likely to vote and engage in local politics, while non-access viewers were not likely to vote or be involved in politics. The results also showed that viewers paid closer attention to local current events, but there were no differences between viewers and non-viewers when asked if they paid attention to local events via local television news or newspapers. Neither of these groups viewed these
media as important sources for information about their community or a means to discover information about local governmental meetings. This demonstrates that these access viewers who pay attention to local government and public affairs programming view this form of cable television as an important source for monitoring local government affairs.

Demographics

Demographic findings were useful in predicting local cable access viewership. Those individuals in the current study who showed some commitment to the community tended to be cable access viewers. Respondents who said they would move from the Las Vegas area after living here briefly were least likely to be access viewers. These respondents who were not planning to live in Las Vegas on a long-term basis had little interest in community issues that would affect long-term residents. There were some access viewers in the current study who indicated they might move from the areas within a few years. They may have found cable access television useful in learning about the community and as a means to help them determine if they want to remain in the area. Unique to this study is the level of population growth in the Las Vegas, Clark County market that has not been recently seen anywhere else in the United States. The population growth has brought new residents and potential viewers to the area. The demographic results allowed an opportunity to explore whether length of residence in the community influenced viewership of cable access.

The current study found no differences between new residents and long-time residents and their decision to view cable access programming. This outcome suggests that other factors may influence whether an individual seeks out and views cable access
programming. There is a need for future research to examine whether Las Vegas residents’ lifestyle factors influence their decision to seek out cable access television in this unique 24-hour city where gaming drives the local and state economy. Gaming is the bread and butter of many residents who work in the city’s hotels and casinos. These casinos and hotels can be compared to the factories in other communities where industry is a large part of the community and the economy. Many of the new jobs in Las Vegas are in the gaming industry and tend to attract working-class people who are often transient.

The local cable access channel’s programming is dominated by government programming including county and city meetings and other public affairs programs. This explains why a majority of the respondents in the current study indicated that they watched this kind of programming most often.

**Implications for Cable Operators**

Despite the cable television industry’s preference to commercial programming, cable system operators should consider promoting non-commercial access television because of its product difference to traditional cable programming and to satisfy franchiser demands. Operators should recognize cable access programming’s uniqueness as a service not readily available through other media and that it could be valuable in marketing overall programming.

Results from the current study point out the future need for channel operators and programmers to develop on-air and external program promotion. Although most access budgets are limited and used primarily for equipment and personnel, the results revealed that there is an audience for government and public affairs programming that would
benefit from greater programming promotion. Results indicate that access viewers and non-viewers do not use typical programming schedules found in the local newspaper or television guides. Respondents prefer the on-air viewing guide or channel surfing when deciding what to watch on television. Therefore, on-air program promotion would be the most effective way to reach cable access viewers.

Programs on the cable access channel could be promoted electronically in various ways. First, an agreement could be made with the local cable provider to include individual cable access programs in cable’s current on-air programming guide or offer the cable access channel schedule separately at a certain time every day or week. Secondly, providers could help promote cable access programming with appropriate announcements or banners on the viewing guide.

Based on funding, external program promotion could include periodic public service announcements on regular cable channels informing viewers where to view local governmental meetings and where to tune-in to public affairs programming. People who have just moved to Las Vegas could be made aware of the cable access channel when they register their vehicle at the Nevada Department of Motor Vehicles or when they register to vote. Cable providers could inform new and established cable subscribers about cable access programming by including information in their monthly statements.

Diffusion of Innovation Theory

In relation to the diffusion of innovation theory, cable access television viewers in the current study followed Rogers’ key elements of the theory and the five stages of the adoption process. These are awareness, interest, evaluation, trial and adoption.
(Rogers, 1995). Individuals within a social system fit into one of the five adopter categories including: innovators; early adopters; early majority; late majority; and laggards. More than one third, 36.2%, of the respondents are cable access television viewers. They are the early adopters who adopted the innovation of cable access in Las Vegas as a valuable community resource. This group of access viewers may have become interested in the medium and communicated the idea from one individual to another possibly within their social circle at various meeting and community events. Once they became aware of cable access, they evaluated it, tried it and then adopted it. Adoption of cable access over time was not examined in this study and could be examined in future studies. A survey group of individuals could be introduced to cable access television and be monitored from introduction through the adoption process over a period of months. This may provide further information regarding who is watching and the process of adoption over time.

The non-viewers stalled in the adoption process and did not make into any of the adopter categories. For these non-viewers, the idea of cable access television was made available to them regardless of their acceptance. Cable access television is available to both groups, but it is an individual choice to watch.

In previous research on the diffusion of innovation theory, Pandey and Yadama (1992) discovered that cultural compatibility and relative advantage are major factors for adoption of a new technology in their study of Nepal residents and new improved cookstove. Unlike Darley and Beniger’s (1981) energy study, there is no “house doctor” for cable access television. There is no one assigned to show the general public how to
discover cable access television and become regular viewers. In the energy study, a house
doctor was used to help the general public install energy-saving devices in their homes
since installation was seen as a barrier to energy conservation.

Unawareness is a barrier in this study of cable access television. In order to raise
awareness and attract more viewers, programs on the cable access channels should be
announced on a television viewing schedule and the programming content be geared
toward attracting new viewers. Current public access needs to expand to accommodate
the 24-hour nature of the city to allow viewers at all hours. Cable access television as an
innovation must offer advantages to the general public to lure them in as viewers. Lifestyle
factors unique to the Las Vegas market could also be barriers to adoption and should be
examined closer in feature studies.

Cable access television benefits not only those who watch it, but an entire
community can be strengthened by its existence. Cable access programming raises
awareness among community viewers who turn to access for local information such as
county and city council meetings. The entire community benefits by having concerned and
informed citizens who are empowered to vote in local elections and provoke change to
improve their community. Cable operators benefit by providing the space and, in turn,
drawing more cable viewers.

Further Research

Further research on the audience for cable access programming is warranted.
Previous research is dated from the 1970s and 1980s at a time when the cable industry
was establishing itself in the television industry and little research has been done on the
1990s cable access audience. Previous studies are hampered by the limited scope of technology at the time which may have limited the numbers of people who had cable.

New and continually changing technology requires new studies on audiences and programming content. This study provides an updated survey on the cable access television audience. It also explores the resources that are available to assist audiences decide what to watch. Respondents preferred just turning on the television set and seeing what’s on, or relying on their knowledge of the programming schedule.

The results suggest that more information is needed on access television audiences, especially regarding economic differences given the diversity of the Las Vegas community and the transient nature. A measure of the community’s appreciation or lack of appreciation for culture, such as ballet, symphony and other events could be explored further to determine whether cable access viewers attend these events or would like to see them aired on cable access programming. There is also a need to further examine how degrees of community involvement, commitment, and age help predict viewership of governmental access programming including, county commission and city council meetings. Variables should be developed in a future study to measure an individual’s viewing habits of public and educational access programming and their degree of involvement in the community, government and education.

In preparation for the 21st century, the television industry is reviewing its programming decisions as franchises agreements expire, are renegotiated and cable access defines its role in cable television’s increasingly competitive marketplace. Localized programming on PEG access channels could be an asset to market segments wanting to
buy video services with a commitment to their community. Due to the diversity of PEG access channels, more information is needed about access audiences. The results of further research on cable access audiences can provide worthy information for municipalities and their renegotiations with cable providers, offer a better understanding of community cable access and provide support for future maintenance of access or expansion possibilities in the current competitive climate.
DATE: November 17, 1998

TO: Dr. Paul Traudt (CS-5007)
    Jeannette Lynn Green Davies (CS-5007)

FROM: Dr. William E. Schulze, Director
       Office of Sponsored Programs (X1357)

RE: Status of Human Subject Protocol Entitled: "Cable Access Television and the Las Vegas Community: a Study of Clark County Viewers"

OSP #381f1198-144e

The protocol for the project referenced above has been reviewed by the Office of Sponsored Programs and it has been determined that it meets the criteria for exemption from full review by the UNLV human subjects Institutional Review Board. This protocol is approved for a period of one year from the date of this notification and work on the project may proceed.

Should the use of human subjects described in this protocol continue beyond a year from the date of this notification, it will be necessary to request an extension.

If you have any questions regarding this information, please contact Marsha Green in the Office of Sponsored Programs at 895-1357.

cc: OSP File

Office of Sponsored Programs
4505 Maryland Parkway • Box 451037 • Las Vegas, Nevada 89154-1037
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Clark County Access Television Audience Survey – Summer 1997

"Hello, my name is ______________. I'm a graduate student in the Hank Greenspun School of Communication at UNLV. We're conducting a telephone survey about television viewing. Please be assured that I am not asking for a contribution. The survey will only take five or so minutes. Your opinions are valuable and will be taken seriously. Would you be willing to participate?"

___Y (continue, complete PHONE# and CALLER# items below and on last page upon completion of survey)
___N (politely thank respondent and terminate interview)

SURVEY#______ CALLER#______ CODER#______

"Am I talking to someone at least eighteen years of age in the household?" (If not, ask if there's someone currently at home who's 18 or older. Then, repeat introductory script).

(Additional information, if necessary at any time during interview). "This project is directed by Dr. Pauli J. Traudt, Associate Professor in the Hank Greenspun School of Communication at UNLV. Your telephone number was randomly generated, and you will remain anonymous. Dr. Traudt may be contacted should you require any additional information." (provide office telephone number only if directly requested to do so — 895-3647) (callers, note! This survey instrument has been precoded whenever possible. Many of the answers include numbers in the answer categories. At no time are you to ever read these numbers to respondents. Simply indicate the respondent's answer to a particular answer by circling the number corresponding to that answer.)

I. Introductory Qualifiers

1. Ok, here's the first question. How many working T.V. sets are there in your household?

___ (enter number. If "0", thank respondent and hang up. Do not count this survey as completed)

2. Do you have cable television? ___Y ___2 N (If "No," continue to Section II. TV Information)

If "Yes," Do you get cable from Prime Cable? ___Y ___2 (If "Yes," continue to Sec. II. TV Information)

If "No," Who does provide your cable service? (mark all that apply)

___01__ Bluebird ___02__ Wunder ___03__ Clark Cablevision ___04__ Falcon ___05__ WanTV

___06__ SuperChannels ___07__ MMDS ___08__ DBS ___09__ ...through the apartment/building/complex...

Other: ________________________________

3. Generally, would you rate your television provider as excellent, good, fair, or poor?

___4__ Excellent ___3__ Good ___2__ Fair ___1__ Poor

II. TV Information

Now I'm going to read a list of sources that you might use when deciding what to watch on TV. You simply tell me whether you always, sometimes, rarely, or never use these sources. Now, would you say that you use... (read each scale item with each dimension) ...always, sometimes, rarely, never?

3. ...a weekly guide from a Sunday paper? Always (4) Rarely (2) Never (1)

4. ...a listing from a local newspaper? Always (4) Rarely (2) Never (1)

5. ...weekly issues of TV Guide magazine? Always (4) Rarely (2) Never (1)

6. ...tuning to a viewing guide on one of your TV channels? (Prime Channel 34) Always (4) Rarely (2) Never (1)

7. ...just tuning on the television set and seeing what's on? Always (4) Rarely (2) Never (1)

8. ...the monthly guide from the cable company? (ask...even if they have cable) Always (4) Rarely (2) Never (1)

9. ...you don't use any kind of guide...you just know what's on? Always (4) Rarely (2) Never (1)

10. ...friends or family? Always (4) Rarely (2) Never (1)
III. Prime Cable Channel 4 Viewership

11. Do you remember ever watching programs or programming on Prime Cable Channel 4, the Government Access and UNLV TV Channel? __1__ Y If, "Yes," Can you name or describe any shows that you've seen on this channel? (List up to three verbatim, then go to next section)  __2__ N If, "No," or "I don't watch Channel 4," or etc., then skip to Section V. Community Involvement.

__2__ If, "Remember, I told you earlier, I don't get Prime!" or etc., skip to Section V. Community Involvement.

__3__ If, "I don't remember..." or "Huh?" or "Don't Know," or "What's Channel 4?" or etc., then, "Well, Channel 4, the Government Access and UNLV TV Channel carries C-Span2, local government, and university access programming. Now, do you remember ever watching Channel 4?

__1__ Y __2__ N If, "No," skip to Section V. Community Involvement

If, "Yes," Can you name or describe any shows that you've seen on this channel? (List up to three verbatim, then go to next section)

1. ____________________________ 2. ____________________________ 3. ____________________________

IV. Prime Cable Channel 4 - Programming Preferences

Now I'm going to read to you a short list of specific programs that have appeared on Channel 4. I would like for you to tell me whether you always, sometimes, rarely, or never watch these programs: Now, do you watch... (read each scale item after reading each program title) ...always, sometimes, rarely, or never?

12. Board of Clark County Commissioners Meetings? Always (4) Rarely (2) Never (1)

13. City Council of Las Vegas Meetings? Always (4) Rarely (2) Never (1)

14. Any news magazine shows from local government? Always (4) Rarely (2) Never (1)

15. The live, call-in show "Town Hall" with Mayor Jan Jones? Always (4) Rarely (2) Never (1)

16. Shows about McCarran Airport? Always (4) Rarely (2) Never (1)

17. Shows produced by UNLV? Always (4) Rarely (2) Never (1)

18. "Homework Hotline" from the Clark County School District? Always (4) Rarely (2) Never (1)

19. Okay, Do you feel that this kind of local programming found on Prime Channel 4 is useful? __1__ Y __2__ N

20. Would you like to see more, less, or about the same amount of this kind of programming? __3__ More __2__ About the same __1__ Less
V. Community Involvement
Now I’d like to ask you some questions about your participation in various community events and activities. The same set of answers you’ve used in the past are used here. Would you say that you always, sometimes, rarely, or never.... (read each scale item after reading each dimension)

21. ...vote in local elections?
   Always Sometimes Rarely Never
   (4) (3) (2) (1)

22. ...get involved in local politics?
   (4) (3) (2) (1)

23. ...keep up with current events about your community?
   (4) (3) (2) (1)

24. ...volunteer for activities in your community?
   (4) (3) (2) (1)

25. ...pay attention to local television news stories about your community?
   (4) (3) (2) (1)

26. ...read articles in the newspaper dealing with your community’s issues?
   (4) (3) (2) (1)

VI. Demographics Finally, I’d like to get some information about you.
27. I’m going to read some age categories and you simply tell me when I’ve reached the category for your age:
   _1_ 18-24  _2_ 25-34  _3_ 35-49  _4_ 50-54  _5_ 55 plus

28. Sex (Don’t Ask, just check off appropriate box) _1_ Female  _2_ Male

29. How many years have you lived in Clark County? _____ Years _____ Months (if less than 1 year)

30. Is it likely, somewhat likely, or not very likely that you will move out of the Las Vegas area within the next one to two years?
   _3_ likely  _2_ somewhat likely  _1_ not very likely

31. Do you _1_ own, or _2_ rent your current residence?

32. Do you live in a _1_ house, _2_ apartment or condominium, _3_ mobile home, or _8_ other type of housing?

33. Now I’m going to read some education categories and you simply tell me when I’ve reached the category for the highest level of education you have completed. Have you:
   _1_ completed some high school or less  _2_ completed high school  _4_ completed some college
   _3_ completed vocational or technical school  _5_ completed college  _6_ completed some graduate school
   _7_ completed graduate school

Thank you very much for cooperating with our survey. Goodbye!

PHONE# ______________ (enter telephone number for each completed survey)
REFERENCES


41


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