

HOW DO CANADIANS CHOOSE WHAT TO WATCH?

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A new CMF report found that the majority of Canadians rely on recommendations from friends to discover new content.

The Canada Media Fund released the second part of its two-part report on discoverability at the Vancouver International Film Festival yesterday.

The report, Discoverability: Toward a Common Frame of Reference – Part 2: The Audience Journey, examines how Canadians find and choose which content to interact with – and what our friends like or dislike plays a significant part in what we ourselves choose to watch.

According to the report, which compiled results from various surveys, 59% of Canadian TV viewers over the age of 18 discover new content through recommendations from friends. How we receive those recommendations is changing, however.

First, though, the CMF report examined how Canadians watch content. It found that, while the vast majority of Canadian households (82%) subscribe to a broadcast distribution undertaking (BDU), the number is declining, with 11.4 million Canadians subscribing in 2014 and 11.2 million subscribing in 2015.

Similarly, Canadians' average weekly viewing hours of traditional TV have declined. In 2009/2010, Canadians aged two and up watched 28 hours of television. In 2013/2014, that number decreased 2.1% to 27.4 hours. The decrease was most noticeable in teenagers aged 12-17, whose average weekly viewing hours decreased to 19.9 hours in 2013/2014 from 23 in 2009/2010.

Canadians are still consuming content, of course, they just have more devices on which to access it. According to the report, 75% of Canadians over the age of 18 own a smartphone, 89% own a computer, 54% own a tablet and 40% own internet-enabled televisions.

Perhaps unsurprisingly then, the report found streaming video is becoming the new norm for Canadians. A survey on the habits of Canadian youth (aged nine to 18) commissioned by the Shaw Rocket Fund in 2014 found while TV viewing still exceeded digital viewing among the nine to 15-year-olds, Canadians 15 years and older (outside Quebec) watch more content online. Canadians outside of Quebec over the age of 16 watched 15.14 hours on digital platforms (a laptop, smartphone, tablet, Netflix, YouTube) and only 8.15 hours on traditional TV, for example.

Whether Canadians are watching online or on traditional television sets, peer-to-peer sharing is central to how Canadians discover content. According to the Shaw Rocket Fund study, 71% of Canadians (outside of Quebec) aged nine to 18 relied on friends telling them about content “face-to-face,” while 40% relied on friends recommendations through social media (Facebook, Twitter). Half of respondents relied on TV advertisements to help them choose content, and 35% relied on online ads.

In a spring 2016 MTM survey of Canadians aged 18 and over, 27% relied on recommendations from friends, with only 17% relying on commercials on TV and radio. If you break those findings down by age category, boomers rely much more heavily on TV and radio commercials, while 18-49 year-olds rely on friends’ recommendations. For example, 41% of those 27 to 34 rely on recommendations from friends, while only 17% of those aged 60-70 do. Conversely, 23% of those aged 60-70 rely on commercials, while only 11% of those aged 27 to 34 do.

Overall, the CMF report argued conversations among consumers are now deemed more important than marketing communications in terms of how consumers make decisions. The report quotes journalist and professor Jeff Jarvis who wrote, “In young people’s lives, content is not a product to be consumed. For them, content is a social token that feeds their conversations.”

The resulting conversation about the content, the study argues, is often just as important – if not more – than the content itself. On that note, it suggest that content creators need to develop one-on-one personal relationships with the audience before, during and after production in order to keep audiences engaged – and talking – at all stages.

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