Music videos: How they are consumed by means of television and the Internet.

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Abstract: By what channels are people consuming music videos, and what are music video viewers’ motivations? We explore the status of television and the Internet as the main currently used distribution channels for music videos, with results indicating that fewer music videos are consumed in comparison with the 1980s and 1990s. Yet while consumption of music videos via television has significantly decreased, use via the Internet has increased. Motivations associated with specific content interests appear to have declined in importance over the years, while motivations, such as ‘just listening to the music’, dominate current music video viewing.

Introduction

Most quantitative and qualitative research into how much and what kind of viewing of music videos occurs on television is now rather old, and hence is of doubtful value in today’s fast-changing media environment. To date there has been little research into consumption of music videos on the Internet. Although the Internet is a relatively
young distribution channel for music videos compared with television, it now appears to be attracting many viewers (Cheng, Dale, & Liu, 2007). Since television and the Internet differ in terms of their use of music videos, a need for new research in this field is indicated.

A major difference between television and the Internet is the degree of user interactivity with the medium (Koch, 2001). It appears likely that television is about to become more interactive, and provide the viewer with more ability to be selective in its use. This stems especially from the innovation of digital TV (Morris & Smith-Chaigneau, 2005). However, television is still a medium that is consumed much more passively than the Internet (Slot, 2007).

More interactive television will create new opportunities for viewers of music videos to adapt their viewing behaviour, and so their motivations for watching music videos may also evolve in different ways. The aim of this study is to identify current usage patterns and on this basis to consider the possible nature of change in consumption of music videos via television and the Internet.

**Literature Review: Quantitative consumption of music videos**

According to Sun and Lull (1986), teenage MTV viewers in the USA of the 1980s watched 126 minutes of music videos on television on average every day, while in a more recent study only 20 percent of them watch one hour or longer a day (Kaiser Family Foundation, 2003). Quandt (1997) argues that the ‘hype’ of the 1980s about music videos diminished in the 1990s. However, it is likely that today this trend will have continued and the degree of interest by viewers in the media format may have shown a further decline compared with the 1990s. It is also the case now that television viewers no longer have the opportunity to watch music videos in the same quantities as they appeared to have in the 1980s or 1990s. This is because commonly in the new millennium, music television channels such as MTV have changed their focus more to reality TV shows and to entertainment shows, while broadcasting fewer and fewer music videos (Frieling, 2006). However, the researchers were unable to obtain precise current data concerning the quantitative use of music videos on television.
According to Zettel (2007), 70 percent of all Internet users in the USA watch online videos. Zettel went on to say that they watch two videos on average a day and use the Internet 151 minutes a month on average for watching online videos. Watching music videos on the Internet is more popular among young adults (18-30 years old) than any other kinds of online videos, according to a study based on a sample of 500 globally recruited and equally weighted respondents (Advertising.com, 2007). Seventy-six percent of young adults in the USA watch music videos on the Internet and 31 percent of these do so every day (Madden, 2007). However, these studies do not provide any information about the amount of time people watch music videos as such on the Internet.

**Literature Review: Qualitative consumption of music videos**

Many researchers distinguish between watching music videos either as foreground (without any other activities) or background activity (while engaged in other activities such as doing homework or telephoning) (Quandt, 1997). Depending on what people do or do not do while they watch music videos, the attention they can give to music videos differs (Guntermann, 1993). In the 1980s Abt (1987, p. 106) found, based on interviews with 385 Californian music videos viewers aged 10-51, that:

Most of the young adults who watched MTV said they attended to the channel as both foreground and background (65%), while 21% said they watched it only foreground, and 13% watched it only background. Those who reported watching MTV as both indicated that viewing time was evenly divided between foreground (51%) and background (49%).

According to Altrogge and Amann (1991), at the beginning of the 1990s 40 percent of German young adults typically watched music videos as foreground while 60 percent had them as background activity. However, no more recent research into foreground and background viewing has been found. Moreover, studies on whether music videos on the Internet are typically watched as foreground or background activity do not yet seem to have occurred.

**Viewing motivations**

The most recent research on the motivations for viewing music videos came from
Schmidbauer and Löhr (1999). Based on interviews with 154 high school students and 248 university students from Germany they identified the following five motivations:

- **Music-motivation:** Viewers are mainly interested in the music and its potential influence on their emotions.
- **Video-motivation:** The visualisation is considered as an incentive for consuming music and increases the emotional experience of the music.
- **Lifestyle-motivation:** Music videos are watched because of issues such as body language, dance and fashion shown in the music videos which represent a certain lifestyle. Viewers adopt these elements to some extent in their everyday life.
- **Sex and aggressiveness motivation:** Sexual and aggressive contents of the music videos are considered stimulating.
- **Escapism-motivation:** People watch music videos for entertainment which helps them to escape from problems of the real world for a certain period of time.

Altrogge and Amann’s (1991) research is the only one found to date which has established a ranking of motivations based on the frequency with which they were named by German young adults. In order of motivations most frequently stated by interviewees:

- Hearing the music and seeing the musicians performing at the same time.
- Better understanding of the lyrics through the visualisations.
- Watching music videos for lifestyle orientation.
- Watching music videos for entertainment and as an escape from problems of everyday life.

**Research Question**

All studies mentioned in the literature review sections above appear to be lacking in two respects. First, they address watching music videos in one distribution channel only, television. Second, even the studies which consider television as a distribution channel for music videos are out of date and, therefore, should be questioned in terms
of their current relevance. Therefore, up-to-date research is needed that takes into account both television and the Internet as distribution channels for music videos.

Specifically, how do people watch music videos via the distribution channels of television and the Internet? Then, to build further on earlier studies, up-to-date data are sought on the quantitative consumption of music videos via both distribution channels, and to describe the qualitative consumption of music videos through both distribution channels. We also seek to identify the motivations for watching music videos and their relative importance for viewers.

**Methodology**

Via snowball sampling technique, 44 participants between 19 and 30 years old were obtained. This age group seemed appropriate, given that Berry and Shelton (1999) describe this audience as the one that predominantly watches music videos. A survey was created and promulgated via the provider Esurveypro, hosted on www.esurveypro.com. Our questionnaire could be accessed via a standard Internet browser such as Internet Explorer or Mozilla Firefox. We had identified www.esurveypro.com as the best provider for the online survey, since in contrast with others such as www.surveymonkey.com or www.zoomerang.com it permitted an unlimited number of survey questions and responses.

The survey asked how and why people use music videos on television and the Internet: How much do you watch music videos? How much attention do you pay to music videos? What are your motivations for watching music videos? The requirements of the Massey University Human Ethics Committee were considered and the survey was formulated to ensure compliance (Massey University, 2007).

People participated within the survey by clicking on a hyperlink that led directly to the online survey. The hyperlink had been first sent via an invitation email to 15 friends of the primary researcher, with those friends being located in Germany, New Zealand, Australia, Netherlands and England. The email also invited these recipients to send the link to other people they knew; the latter were also requested to send the link to people in their circle of acquaintances. This comprises the snowball sampling
technique, permitting participants to recruit future addressees from among their acquaintances (Bradley, 1999). This resulted in 44 respondents taking up the invitation to participate.

The participants were not asked to indicate their home country, but it is considered probable that most of them were located in the four countries mentioned above. This constitutes a limitation within the research method. In addition, Salganik and Heckathorn (2004, p. 197) refer to other potential biases:

Since people recruit their friends, those with many friends are more likely to be included in the sample than social isolates. Another main concern among researchers centers around the choice of seeds (the first people to be included in the sample). Since all people in the sample are indirectly recruited by the seeds, researchers believe that any small bias in selecting the seeds would be compounded in unknown ways as the sampling process continued.

The data gathered through the online survey were analysed via the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) 14.0. The correlation instrument was Spearman rank correlation, used “to calculate the strength of the relationship between two variables” (Pallant, 2001, p. 115).

**Results**

Of the 44 participants, 23 were females (52 percent) and 18 were males (41 percent), with three not advising gender (7 percent). Figure 1 (over the page) shows the distribution of the participants by age, ranging from 19 to 30 with a mean of 24 years.
Figures 2 and 3 (below) show how often the participants watched music videos (note statistics rounded to the nearest whole number). Figure 2 refers to the frequency of music video consumption on television and Figure 3 to the frequency of music video consumption on the Internet.

**Figure 1: Age of the participants**

**Figure 2: Frequency of music video consumption on television**

**Figure 3: Frequency of music video consumption on the Internet**
Figures 2 and 3 demonstrate that most of the participants tended to use each distribution channel only once a week or less often for watching music videos (64 percent via television and 76 percent via the Internet). Moreover, by comparison they also indicate that the frequency of music video consumption on television was higher than on the Internet: while 36 percent watched music videos on television more than once a week as indicated in Figure 2, only 24 percent did so via the Internet, as shown in Figure 3.

![Figure 4: Duration of music video watching non-stop per viewing on television](image1)
![Figure 5: Duration of music video watching non-stop per viewing on the Internet](image2)

Figures 4 and 5 demonstrate how long on average the participants tended to stay on the distribution channels to watch music videos non-stop, for television and Internet viewing respectively (note statistics rounded to the nearest whole number). Most participants stayed fewer than 15 minutes non-stop on television and/or the Internet when watching music videos. Moreover, although there were also a few participants who indicated a viewing duration of up to one hour on both distribution channels (7 percent of the participants on television and 5 percent of the participants on the Internet), no participant watched music videos two hours or longer non-stop on either distribution channel. Figures 4 and 5 indicate that most participants watched music videos for a longer period on television than they did on the Internet: most stayed 10-15 minutes on television (Figure 4: 46 percent of the participants), while they stayed only five minutes or less on the Internet to do so (Figure 5: 49 percent of the participants).
We also sought to explore participants’ perceptions of recent changes in their pattern of music video consumption:

![Figure 6: Changes in music video consumption within the last two years](image)

Figure 6 demonstrates the results for whether the number of music videos that participants watched now was comparable to the number they watched two years ago, regardless of distribution channel (note statistics rounded to the nearest whole number). Most participants said they watched fewer music videos today than two years ago (47 percent), though 33 percent watched more. Just over a fifth of participants (21 percent) watched about the same number.
Figures 7 and 8 indicate changes over two years in music video viewing patterns on television and the Internet (note statistics rounded to the nearest whole number). A significant majority (Fig. 7) watched fewer music videos on television today than two years ago (61 percent). Yet the opposite is the case for the Internet (Fig. 8), in that a substantial proportion watched more music videos on the Internet today than they did two years ago (70 percent).

The participants were also asked why they increased Internet use and decreased television use for watching music videos: The majority of the participants (67 percent) referred to the accessibility of music videos on the Internet at all times as the main advantage over television. Sixteen percent of the participants said that they generally spent more and more time on the Internet than watching television, because of their working conditions. Nine percent considered the decreasing costs for the Internet as a reason for this trend, while another 8 percent referred to the social functions on the Internet such as music video sharing, chatting and discussions about music videos.
**Qualitative consumption of music videos**

As indicated earlier, we wanted to explore whether music videos were consumed in the background (while pursuing other activities) or in the foreground (without other activities and provided with the viewer’s full attention). Fig. 9 demonstrates that most participants watched music videos on television in the background (65 percent) but consumed music videos in the Internet foreground (76 percent) (note statistics rounded to the nearest whole number).
Motivations for watching music videos

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group*</th>
<th>Ranking by importance</th>
<th>Motivations</th>
<th>Important</th>
<th>Not important</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Just to listen to the music</td>
<td>93%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Just for audio-visual entertainment</td>
<td>93%</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Enjoying seeing the musicians perform</td>
<td>82%</td>
<td>15%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Better understanding of song lyrics</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>45%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5</td>
<td>Enjoying seeing new trends</td>
<td>48%</td>
<td>52%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>Enjoying sexual content</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>72%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7</td>
<td>Enjoying aggressive content</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>86%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 10: Motivations for watching music videos ranked in order of importance for the viewers

*Ranking appears in three groups due to the large difference in the percentages of participants who indicated the motivations listed as important.

The participants were asked how important they considered each of the motivations shown in Figure 10 in their viewing of music videos. They assigned one of the following values to each motivation: ‘not at all important’, ‘not very important’, ‘of some importance’, ‘very important’ or ‘extremely important’. For convenience of data analysis, the values ‘not at all important’ and ‘not very important’ were aggregated under ‘not important’ and the values ‘of some importance’, ‘very important’ and ‘extremely important’ were combined under ‘important’.

Based on the ranking, three groups of motivations emerged. Within these groups the motivations were close in respect of the percentage of participants who indicated them as important, while substantial differences appeared between the three groups.

In the first group are the first three motivations: ‘Just to listen to the music’, ‘Just for audio-visual entertainment’ and ‘Enjoying seeing the musicians performing’. The second group comprises the motivations ‘Better understanding of song lyrics’, and ‘Enjoying seeing new trends’. That is, more than half of the participants (55 percent) indicated ‘Better understanding of song lyrics’ as important, while for just under half
of the participants ‘Enjoying seeing new trends’ was an important motivation for watching music videos. The third group contains the two bottom-ranked motivations ‘Enjoying sexual content’ and ‘Enjoying aggressive content’.

**Discussion**

Most participants only once a week or less often watched music videos on both television and the Internet, and their average duration of viewing was not longer than 10-15 minutes. This indicates a much lower consumption of music videos than the results reported in earlier studies, irrespective of the fact that these studies explored this matter only in relation to television. In previous European as well as American studies a duration of viewing of between 90 and 130 minutes a day was indicated (Klingler & Eimeren, 1995; Sun & Lull, 1986).

Quandt (1997) stated that the media format music video had already started to lose its attractiveness for viewers in the 1980s after the advent of MTV, when it was ‘hyped’ as a new media format; this trend seems to have continued. The current study suggests that consumption of music videos has decreased further in the present decade, with most participants indicating that they watched fewer music videos today than two years ago.

The results also reveal differences between television and the Internet in their quantitative use; television seeming to be used more frequently for watching music videos than the Internet. However, the results also show participants increasing the number of music videos they watched on the Internet over the last two years, while their consumption of music videos on television went down. In this decade two factors have significantly influenced this development: first, many music television channels, such as MTV, have concentrated their programming more and more on reality shows while broadcasting far fewer music videos (Frieling, 2006). Second, the popularity of online video watching did not significantly increase until independent video sharing websites such as youtube.com, video.google.com and myvideo.com emerged within the last two years (Cheng et al., 2007). These websites are watched by over 20 million people a month and their category ‘music videos’ is the most popular choice (Cheng et al., 2007). The participants stated that they watch more music videos
on the Internet because of the features those websites offer. Those websites are not content providers, but function as platforms for users to “upload videos, share clips with their friends, and provide a forum for social networking around video content” (Turkheimer, 2007, p. 5). They emerged as users were “no longer satisfied with their role as simple content consumers”, but wanted to create and socially share content with a large and often unknown networked audience (Mabillot, 2007, p. 40). Hence, coming back to the two factors, the shift towards more music videos being watched on the Internet and fewer via television does not seem to be surprising, but natural:

Not unlike the shift in television towards ‘reality-based’ programming, the Internet users are finding user-driven content, whether it’s […] shared photos [or] videos as compelling as, and perhaps even more refreshing than traditional content from magazines, TV networks and film studios. (Skiba, Tamas, & Robinson, 2006, p. 15).

Concerning qualitative use, most participants consumed music videos on television in the background while undertaking other activities. By contrast, the Internet was used by most of the participants in the foreground without other activities occurring at the same time, thus with viewers’ full attention. Studies from the late 1980s and early 1990s support the finding that television was used for watching music videos mostly while undertaking other activities and, therefore, somewhat non-attentively (Abt, 1987; Altrogge & Amann, 1991). Therefore, no significant changes concerning this matter seem to have emerged over the last 20 years.

However, while no former studies could be found concerning viewer attention paid to music videos on the Internet, assumptions can perhaps be made as to why viewers might pay more attention to music videos on the Internet than on television. The factor of interactivity appears to be important. According to Steuer (1992, p. 84) interactivity can be defined as “the extent to which users can participate in modifying the form and content of a mediated environment in real time”. The degree of interaction of a system depends on three factors: 1) how fast content can be altered, 2) in how many ways content can be manipulated and 3) how the controls of a mediated environment mirror controls of the real world (Steuer, 1992). In this light, it becomes clear why Koch (2001) argues that the Internet is more interactive than television. When consuming music videos on the Internet, users typically cannot watch more
than one music video, without interacting with the computer, in order to make a selection. That is, as music videos are usually not much longer than three minutes, people who watch more than one music video need to pay full attention to the medium at least around every three minutes. This level of attention is not required for watching music videos on television. On television music videos are generally broadcast and thus allow very limited viewer control. As Kiss and Esch (2006) argue that a higher level of interactivity is associated with a higher degree of attention paid towards a medium, it is clear why music video watching on the Internet potentially requires more attention than music video consumption via television.

From another perspective, people might pay more attention to music videos on the Internet than on television due to the video-on-demand nature of the Internet as a distribution channel for music videos. As users presumably always choose the music video they want to see, they are more likely to pay attention to these than to the ones broadcast on television which they cannot choose.

The current study also ranks participants’ motivations for watching music videos. Most participants consumed music videos mainly for the entertainment factor of the music, visualisation, and seeing the musicians perform. Specific content interests such as ‘Better understanding of the lyrics’ or ‘Enjoying new trends’ were less important.

These findings differ to those reported over 15 years ago by Altrogge and Amann (1991), in which specific content interests as those mentioned above were indicated as much more important for the participants. It is therefore implied that viewer interest in specific music video content has diminished over time, while entertainment factors have increased in importance as viewer motivators.

The current study reveals similarities as well as differences in people’s quantitative and qualitative use of music videos between the distribution channels. In comparison to former studies, use of music videos and motivations to do so appear to have changed over the years. These findings are of interest for communication scholars in that for the first time they take into account music video watching on both television and the Internet. The study’s outcomes may also be of value to marketers of music
videos interested in the evolution of music video watching behaviour and target group motivations.

The current study possesses certain limitations. First are the potential biases of snowball sampling methodology, as already noted. Future studies could more directly address ways to improve representativeness of the participants within the intended sampling frame. Second, the research is restricted to people who use the Internet, as an online survey was used to gather the data. Therefore, information concerning watching of music videos by people who lack access to the Internet could not be gathered. Further research could try to avoid this by employing instruments such as paper-based questionnaires which include people without access to the Internet. Third, the research includes only data gathered from people aged between 19 and 30, which may limit its representativeness, so future studies could focus on a wider age sample than this study has done.

Based on these findings, future studies could explore further which distribution channels might become more important for music video watching and which might become less important. The video-on-demand nature of distribution channels as well as the use of mobile devices such as cell phones for music video watching must be considered in this light (Chong, 2006). Given this technological environment (the video-on-demand as well as increasing mobility) value exists in studying the effects of this environment on music video consumption, with a view to understanding its transferability and perhaps even ultimately its prospects for survival.

References


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