

January 1993

Patterns of Irish Viewing

Tom Harper

Follow this and additional works at: <https://arrow.tudublin.ie/icr>



Part of the [Communication Technology and New Media Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Harper, Tom (1993) "Patterns of Irish Viewing," *Irish Communication Review*. Vol. 3: Iss. 1, Article 8.

doi:10.21427/D72X51

Available at: <https://arrow.tudublin.ie/icr/vol3/iss1/8>

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Current Publications at ARROW@TU Dublin. It has been accepted for inclusion in Irish Communication Review by an authorized administrator of ARROW@TU Dublin. For more information, please contact arrow.admin@tudublin.ie, aisling.coyne@tudublin.ie.



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-Share Alike 4.0 License](#)

Patterns of Irish Viewing

Tom Harper is Director of
Operations & Research, Irish
TAM

Tom Harper

Introduction

Analyses of the way people view programmes have been examined extensively in the USA and in the UK. For example, work by Barwise et al (1988), Collins et al (1982) and Ehrenberg (1990) is generally well known in the broadcasting area. Much of their work has to do with segmentation of the TV audience, audience flow, repeat viewing and audience duplication. This paper examines some of these concepts using Irish data from the AGB TAM panel.

The paper is divided into four main sections. The first section defines the Irish viewing structure and the TAM methodology. The second section examines the debate over the degree to which the TV audience can or cannot be segmented. The third section looks at programme loyalty and the last section examines viewers of episodes over a number of episodes. A special analysis centres on the *Glenroe* broadcasts in January 1992.

Market and Measurement

Although the Republic of Ireland is a small country, it has a complex TV broadcasting environment. All homes have the potential to receive not only RTE but also UK and satellite stations. In terms of reception, homes can be divided into three reception types: cable, multichannel-off air and Dual. The most recent figures from the TAM establishment survey are presented in Table 1.

TABLE 1
TYPES OF TV RECEPTION IN IRELAND

	Number (000's)	Homes %	Number of Adults (000's)
All Homes	1024	100	2474
Cable	398	39	969
Multichannel	281	27	722
Dual	345	34	783

Source: 1992 TAM Establishment Survey

Until recently, cable homes had the potential of receiving 12 or more stations without a decoder box as part of their annual cable subscription. During December 1992, Sky One and Sky News were taken off the Cablelink network. Multichannel off-air homes receive the UK stations as well as the two RTE stations from a roof top aerial. Dual homes can only receive the two RTE stations, RTE 1 and Network 2. For the purpose of this analysis, the target audience will be adults living in either cable homes or multichannel off-air homes. This audience will be referred to as 'Multichannel Adults', that is, all adults who have access to at least six stations.

In such a complex TV market, it is desirable to have the most advanced Television Audience Measurement system available. In 1989, RTE signed a five year contract with AGB TAM to measure Irish viewing. A specially designed peplemeter (4900) is installed in 430 sample homes around the country. The homes are statistically selected to

1. For a more detailed description of the service see Harper (1989)

represent all Irish TV homes. Each person in the home is assigned a person button on the meter handset. The handset also has buttons for viewers to record appreciation of programmes on a one to five point scale. The peplemeter is connected to the telephone in the panel home and each night the TAM central computer contacts the homes and downloads the viewing information. The next morning the data from the 430 homes is validated and processed to produce ratings by noon of that day. The AGB peplemeter also has a special probe which stamps all video recordings and playback.¹

The daily results are accessed online by RTE and the advertising agencies. In addition to the normal TVR's (television ratings) used to rank programmes and commercials broadcast on RTE, the data is stored for monthly secondary analysis. Fortunately, the growth of personal computers and accompanying software has made the manipulation and study of secondary TV data easy.

The time period of the study is selected periods of time in 1992. All results are based on RTE 1 and Network 2 programmes unless specially stated. They were produced through a PC package developed by TAM called TELESCOPE.

Segmentation

During 1990 there was an interesting debate in *Admap* between Hugh Johnson (1990) and Andrew Ehrenberg (1990). This debate centred on the question of TV audience segmentation in relation to programme types. Hugh Johnson argues that 'there is a strong propensity for those viewing a programme of a particular type to want to watch more of the same genre.' Andrew Ehrenberg argues that TV audiences are unsegmented and that 'as groups of TV viewers, we are mostly very similar in the broad types of programmes we watch.'

This section will examine the segmentation question with Irish data. 'Segmentation refers to a programme (or a certain type of programme) being viewed mainly by some identifiable population subgroup (e.g. younger people, owners of hi-fi equipment etc.)' (Barwise & Ehrenberg, 1983). The first step with regard to the Irish data is to group programmes into similar types. For the month of February 1992, approximately 500 programmes were classified into the following types for RTE 1 and Network 2 broadcasts.²

2. See appendix for a detailed list of programmes within each of these nine types.

TABLE 2

CLASSIFICATIONS OF PROGRAMME TYPES ON RTE 1/NETWORK 2, FEBRUARY 1992

Type	Number of Programme Types
Soaps	6
Sit-Coms	13
Drama	16
Talk Shows	5
Sports	4
Films	15
News	6
Serious	16
Irish Language	5

The 500 programmes represent 85 per cent of the total programmes broadcast on RTE in February 1992. Although the analysis does not include all types of programmes, the inter-demographic comparisons should still prove useful. For the month of

February, the amount of time spent viewing these programme types was calculated and compared to the total time viewing RTE by the different audience groups. The results from this TELESCOPE analysis are presented in Table 3.

If TV audiences are largely unsegmented, then there would be little variation in the way that different subgroups allocate their viewing across the different programme categories. Table 3 is quite similar to results produced by Barwise and Ehrenberg in terms of the two social class groups. Although C2DE generally watch more RTE television, the proportion of time spent viewing the different programme types is roughly the same. There does not appear to be any significant difference between ABC1 and C2DE for any of the programme types. (Note that social class 'F' [farmers] has been excluded). It may be that these two social class groupings are too broad to highlight viewing patterns and that finer analysis, on say AB's, would produce different results. Table 3 may also raise the question of whether more relevant 'Lifestyle' groupings can thus be discerned. In terms of the standard social class grouping the Irish data would confirm Ehrenberg's conclusion that TV audiences are largely unsegmented.

TABLE 3

ADULT VIEWING BY SOCIAL CLASS AND AGE
RTE 1 AND NETWORK 2 - FEBRUARY 1992, 14:00 - 23:59

	Average Viewing Per Day mins	Soaps %	Sit Coms %	Drama %	Talk %	Sports %	Film %	News %	Serious %	Irish %
Adults	108	9.5	4.5	8.8	4.4	4.1	6.9	9.1	5.0	2.6
ABC1 Adults	78	10.0	5.5	9.0	4.2	4.6	8.1	9.0	5.7	2.7
C2DE Adults	114	9.7	4.5	9.1	5.1	3.8	7.2	8.9	4.6	2.5
15-24	72	13.8	6.1	8.8	4.3	5.2	9.3	7.4	4.1	3.5
15-34	78	11.8	5.7	8.9	4.1	4.8	8.8	7.6	4.6	3.2
35-54	102	9.7	4.2	8.9	4.3	4.2	7.6	8.9	5.2	2.6
55+	168	7.3	3.8	8.3	4.4	3.2	4.8	10.3	4.7	1.7

In terms of age groups, however, there does appear to be a significant difference in the types of programmes into which adults can be segmented, for example, young people spent a higher percentage of time viewing soaps and sit-coms while older people (55+) spent a higher proportion of time watching news. These age differences are distinct from the Barwise & Ehrenberg work which found that subgroups 'all tend to spend much the same proportion of their viewing time on the various types of programmes available.' They did, however, find some 'small differences in profiles of children, teenagers and to some degree sex (i.e. men and sports).' It does seem difficult to accept that the uniformity of the TV audience with the demographic targeting by programme type is not possible. Indeed, agency time-buying is largely based around the concept of audience targets and it is generally accepted that clever buying will produce better results for the defined target audience. As market research techniques improve, and if sample sizes are large enough so that finer sub-sample analysis or alternative lifestyles clusters can be studied, then there may well be support for the programme segmentation approach.

In broad target groups, adults, men, women, housekeepers etc, the Irish data is similar to the UK in that these groups have similar programme type profiles. Ehrenberg (1990) states that 'the average UK viewer watches only about three of the Top Ten programmes in a given week.' This is also true in Ireland as demonstrated in Table 4.

TABLE 4

MULTICHANNEL ADULT VIEWING OF TOP 10 PROGRAMMES
RTE 1 / NETWORK 2, 1992

			Average No of Programmes viewed		Viewing (%)				
			1+	2+	3+	4+	5+		
Week Ending	23 February	2.8	59	40	26	18	12		
	1 March	2.8	68	47	31	21	13		
	8 March	3.0	67	50	34	22	41		

Table 3 shows that the average Irish adult watches three of the Top ten programmes for that week. Roughly 65 per cent view at least one of the Top Ten and only around 13 per cent see five out of the Top Ten. On average three of the Top Ten are viewed and it is a different three for different people during the week. The remaining 20 or so hours of viewing by adults for that week is spent watching less popular programmes and again these will be different ones for different people. As in the UK, these results show the difficulty in finding sizeable subgroups or segments with a common viewing habit. Ehrenberg would argue that 'as individuals the TV audience is almost infinitely divided into segments of one as it were.'

In spite of the findings here, a more detailed study which examines finer subgroups might well show more distinct TV viewing segments. Often the research does not have robust enough sample sizes for segmentation study. For example, a separate run of the data showed AB Adults spending 7.3 per cent of their TV time watching serious programmes while DE adults, spend 4.1 per cent of their TV time on the same programmes. These results, however, would have to be treated with caution due to the low sample size.

While TV audience composition may be difficult to summarize into groups, programme loyalty and level of repeat viewing do seem to fall into consistent patterns.

Loyalty and repeat viewing

The level of audience overlap between different episodes of popular programmes screened on different days or in different weeks has been estimated at about 50 per cent in the UK and at about 40 per cent in the USA (Barwise and Ehrenberg, 1988). What is the level of audience overlap and duplication in Ireland? We have run a number of analyses with TELESCOPE on the TAM data to examine these statistics for different programmes in Ireland. The results are based on the rule that each viewer included must see at least 50 per cent of the individual programme.

Great Los Angeles Earthquake

On Wednesday 12 February 1992, the first part of the two part action drama mini-series was shown on RTE 1 at 21:15. On Thursday 13 February the second part was broadcast. This programme received a multichannel adult TAM rating of 10 on Wednesday and 14 on Thursday. How many viewers of the programme on the Wednesday tuned in to watch the second part on the Thursday? Table 5 shows that 18 per cent of Multichannel Adults viewed at least one of the episodes but only 6% viewed both. Of the 163,000 viewers (10 per cent of 1.6m) who watched on Wednesday, only 60 per cent or 97,800 tuned in again on the Thursday. Hence, 40 per cent of the viewers of the Thursday episode did not see the first part. Is this typical of other programmes shown on RTE? For example, would we expect this level for *The Late Late Show* or *Kenny Live*?

TABLE 5

MULTICHANNEL ADULT VIEWING OF
GREAT LOS ANGELES EARTHQUAKE, 1992

Potential = 1,625,000	TVR	Viewed*	Viewed*	Repeat
	%	at Least 1	Both	Viewers
		%	%	%
Part 1- 12 February	10	-	-	-
Part 2-13 February	14	18	6	60

*VIEWED AT LEAST 50% OF PROGRAMME.

Twelve programmes broadcast in February and March 1992 were analyzed and the results are shown in Table 6. The audience was examined from one week to the next for each programme. For example, *The Late Late Show* on the 21 February received a multichannel rating of 30. A week later, however, it received a multichannel rating of 32. Not all of the viewers who tuned in on the 21st also viewed on the 28th. In fact only 20 per cent viewed both (2+). Forty-three per cent of multichannel adults saw one of the two broadcasts and the repeat level of viewing (i.e. of the 30 per cent on the 21 February who also viewed on 28 February) is relatively high, at 67 per cent. The overall average of repeat viewing for the 12 programmes examined here is 52 per cent. This is approximately the level found in UK studies (Barwise & Ehrenberg, 1988). These results imply that for RTE programmes, about half the people who see a repetitive programme one week see the next episode in the following week.

TABLE 6

MULTICHANNEL ADULT
REPEAT VIEWING OF SAME PROGRAMME/DIFFERENT WEEK

Programme	Date	TVR	1 +	2 +	Repeat
			%	%	%
<i>The Late Late Show</i>	21/28 February	30			
		32	43	20	67
<i>The Late Late Show</i>	28 Feb/06 Mar	32			
		30	42	19	59
<i>Kenny Live</i>	22/29 February	17			
		21	28	10	59
<i>Winning Streak</i>	21/28 February	21			
		18	29	10	48
<i>Winning Streak</i>	28 Feb/06 Mar	19			
		21	20	11	58
<i>Bibi</i>	12/19 February	11			
		13	18	7	64
<i>Bibi</i>	05/12 February	9			
		11	15	4	44
<i>Secrets</i>	22/29 February	12			
		14	20	5	42
<i>thirtysomething</i>	26 Feb/03 Mar	14			
		15	22	7	50
<i>Today Tonight</i>	25 Feb/03 Mar	14			
		15	22	7	50
<i>Head to Toe</i>	25 Feb/09 Mar	14			
		12	20	6	43
<i>Check-up</i>	25 Feb/03 Mar	8			
		12	17	3	38
Average					52%

ARTICLES

Glenroe

This concept of duplication and patterns of viewing can be applied to the popular soap *Glenroe*. Table 7 was produced by the TELESCOPE package for the month of January 1992. Table 7 shows that while 60 per cent of multichannel adults viewed at least one of the four *Glenroe* episodes on a Sunday, on average they viewed two of the four episodes in the month and only 7 per cent viewed all four. The repeat viewing level from 5 January to 12 January was 52 per cent.

TABLE 7

MULTICHANNEL ADULT VIEWING OF *GLENROE*
SUNDAYS, JANUARY 1992

Date	TVR	No. of episodes viewed	Viewing %			
			1 +	2 +	3 +	4 +
5 January	31	1.0	31	-	-	-
12 January	30	1.3	45	16	-	-
19 January	35	1.8	54	31	11	-
26 January	35	2.2	60	40	25	7

One might argue that those viewers who missed the Sunday episode will catch it on Network 2 on the Thursday. Table 8 examines these episodes for multichannel adults. The Thursday repeat of *Glenroe* achieves lower TVR's, lower cumulative audience (1+, 2+, etc.) and less repeat viewing (13 per cent for 2 and 9 January). One can not simply add the 22 per cent of the Thursdays shown to the 60 per cent of Sundays to find the net reach of *Glenroe* for the month. Some *Glenroe* viewers will move from Sunday to Thursday and some will watch both. Combining all the episodes (Table 9) results in a total cumulative audience of 65 per cent (those multichannel adults who viewed at least one of the nine *Glenroes* episodes in January).

TABLE 8

MULTICHANNEL ADULTS VIEWING OF *GLENROE*
THURSDAY, JANUARY 1992

Date	TVR	No. of episodes viewed	Viewing %				
			1 +	2 +	3 +	4 +	5 +
2nd January	8	1.0	8	-	-	-	-
9th January	6	1.1	12	1	-	-	-
16th January	6	1.2	16	3	0	-	-
23rd January	7	1.4	20	6	1	0	-
30th January	6	1.5	22	8	3	1	0

TABLE 9

MULTICHANNEL ADULT VIEWING OF *GLENROE*,
THURSDAYS AND SUNDAYS, JANUARY 1992

Date	TVR	No. of episodes viewed	Viewing %					
			1 +	2 +	3 +	4 +	5 +	6 +
2 January	8	1.0	8	-	-	-	-	-
5 January	31	1.1	36	-	-	-	-	-
9 January	6	1.1	39	-	-	-	-	-
12 January	30	1.5	51	-	-	-	-	-
16 January	6	1.5	51	-	-	-	-	-
19 January	35	2.0	59	-	-	-	-	-
23 January	7	2.0	60	-	-	-	-	-
26 January	35	2.4	65	-	-	-	-	-
30 January	6	2.5	65	-	-	-	-	-
Summary		2.5	65	46	32	15	4	1

Table 9 shows that of the nine *Glenroe* broadcasts in January 1992, 65 per cent of multichannel adults viewed at least one and on average they viewed 2.5 episodes. Note that the *Glenroe* shown on 30 January did not 'pick-up' any new viewers. That is, there was no increase in the 1+ category of 65 per cent. Of the 97,500 viewers of *Glenroe* (6 per cent of 1.6m) on 30 January, all of them saw at least one of the eight earlier broadcasts. Note that the average number of programmes viewed, 2.5, is not much of an increase on the Sunday episodes, as shown in Table 7.

Further analysis of the viewing over the month shows a high level of loyalty to the Sunday viewing of *Glenroe* but a low level of loyalty to the Thursday one with virtually zero level of duplicated viewing (Table 10).

TABLE 10

MULTICHANNEL ADULT VIEWING OF *GLENROE*
SUNDAY TO SUNDAY, THURSDAY TO THURSDAY, JANUARY 1992**Sundays**

DATE	DUPLICATION %	REPEAT %
1. 5/12 January	16	52
2. 12/19 January	20	61
3. 19/26 January	22	59

Thursdays

DATE	DUPLICATION %	REPEAT %
4. 02/09 January	1	13
5. 09/16 January	1	17
6. 16/23 January	1	17
7. 23/30 January	2	29

For 12 and 19 January (line 2), 20 per cent of multichannel adults viewed both episodes of *Glenroe*. On the Sunday, 61 per cent of those who viewed on the 12th also viewed on the 19th. Compare this to the 1 per cent of multichannel adults who viewed *Glenroe* on Thursday 9th and 16th (line 5) with 17 per cent of those who viewed on the 9th tuning in the following week.

Although the low repeat level of audiences for the Thursday episodes is a function of the low level of ratings, the Tables do seem to show different viewing patterns for the two days of the week. The Thursday audience is fragmented with little built in cumulative audience and an insignificant level of consistent viewing from one week to the next. The first showings on the Sunday, however, have a high degree of loyalty from one week to the next with a high duplication rate, around 20 per cent for two consecutive episodes.

There does seem to be a higher level of repeat viewing moving from a Thursday to a Sunday than from a Thursday to Thursday suggesting that some viewers of the Thursday missed the previous Sunday episode, but got back on the track with the Sunday following the Thursday viewing session. A final analysis was checked to determine the degree of *Glenroe* addiction, that is, the level of multichannel audience who view both Sunday and Thursday episodes in the same week. On average for any given week, about 7 per cent of multichannel adults would view *Glenroe*, first on the Sunday and then again on the Thursday. This apparently high level could be justified. It may be that these 7 per cent of viewers missed the beginning or end on the Sunday and view again on the Thursday to see the bit they missed.

Audience Cumulation

The above analysis has confirmed, for a small sample of RTE programmes, that people who watch a regular programme do not generally watch every episode of the series. This paper now turns to three serials that are broadcast frequently throughout the month. Table 11 shows the results for Multichannel adults viewing in February 1992 for *Coronation Street*, *Home & Away* and *Neighbours*.

During February, 46 per cent of multichannel adults (747,500) saw at least one episode of *Coronation Street*. Their average was four episodes throughout the month. 28% of them saw just one episode, 15 per cent saw two and so forth. Results for *Home & Away* on Network 2 and *Neighbours* on BBC 1 are also shown in Table 11. The results for the 13:30 showing of *Neighbours* is surprisingly high with 38 per cent of multichannel adults seeing at least one episode of *Neighbours* at 13:30. It is interesting to note the success of *Neighbours* at 13:30. BBC show the same episode of *Neighbours* later in the day at 18:30. Results for the 18:30 show are lower, possibly due to increased competition. It may be that multichannel adults are taking the 13:30 opportunity to view *Neighbours* and then some other programme at 18:30 (e.g. *Home & Away*). These results are consistent with results found in other countries, that is, relatively few viewers see all or nearly all of the episodes in any serial. The reverse side of this is that as 'the reach' of these regular series is high, very large numbers of viewers will have seen at least one or two episodes over the season. The reason for the low level of repeat viewers of soaps in Ireland, as in other countries, is more a matter of variable social customs and habits rather than a lack of appreciation of the programmes.

TABLE 11

MULTICHANNEL ADULT VIEWING OF CORONATION STREET,
HOME AND AWAY AND NEIGHBOURS, FEBRUARY 1992.

	No. of Episodes	Reach	Average No. Seen	Number of Episodes seen by percentage Viewers Reach = 100%									
				1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10+
Coronation Street (Network 2)	(12)	46	4	28	15	15	7	4	9	7	4	4	7
Home & Away (Network 2)	(20)	43	6	19	14	7	7	7	7	7	2	5	25
Neighbours (BBC1 13:30)	(20)	38	5	34	10	11	3	8	3	5	3	3	20
Neighbours (BBC1 18:30)	(20)	33	4	39	18	9	6	6	6	3	3	0	10

*Viewers must see 50% of episode to be included.

Conclusion

This paper has examined the behaviour of the RTE audience from a 'pattern of viewing' perspective rather than the traditional quantitative method, (i.e. TVR's or thousands of viewers). In general, the pattern of viewing in Ireland is quite similar to the viewing patterns in the UK. While it may not be easy to segment Irish audiences, it is not impossible. In the period studied here, the broad traditional audience groupings by social class has not produced a significant segment in terms of viewing programme types. An age grouping analysis has shown some variation by different types of programmes. It is also suggested that an acceptable 'Lifestyle' grouping of finer sampling breakdown might continue to produce results supporting segmentation.

It was also found that on average, multichannel adults watch only three of the RTE Top Ten programmes in a given week and that the average repeat level viewing for high rating programmes is about 50%. The in-depth analysis of *Glenroe* showed a loyal audience to RTE 1 on Sunday nights, but a highly fragmented audience to Network 2 on Thursday night. Finally, as in the UK, frequently broadcasted serials like *Coronation Street* reach a wide audience, but very few of these people watch all or nearly all the episodes.

Appendix

Classification of programmes into programmes types

Drama	Serious	Sit-Coms
Hotel	Questions & Answers	The Love Boat
Maigret	World In Action	Dear John
The Corner House	Ethopia - The Time Is	Kate and Allie
Young Riders	Lecture by President Robinson	All for One
Home Front	ENG	Empty Nest
The Hitchikers	Today Tonight	The Golden Girls
Lou Grant	Greek Myths	Cheers
Streets of San Francisco	Master Works	Murphy Brown
Dick Francis Mysteries	Radharc	Love at First Sight
Twilight Zone	Radharc in Retrospect	Roseanne
Midnight Caller	Women at War	Family Ties
MacGyver	New Lease of Death	Major Dad
Love at First Sight	Women of the World	The Cosby Show
The Flying Doctors	Market Place	
Matlock	Visions of Europe	
Baywatch	National Symphony	

ARTICLES

Soaps

Emmerdale
A Country Practice
Home & Away
Coronation Street
Thirtysomething
Glenroe

Films

Lethal Weapon
Color Purple
Buster
City on Fire
That Secret Sunday
Sybil
Leo the Last
King of the Mountain
Destry Rides Again
How to Commit a Marriage
Vendetta for the Sai
Marty
Three Days of the Condor
Mama's Going to Buy you a Mocking Bird
Chisum

News

Six-One
News
Nine O'Clock News
Network News
Late News
The One O'Clock News

Irish

Cursaí
Nuacht
Súilt Thart
Seachtain
Scaoil Amach Bobailí

Sports

Italian Soccer
Sport Stadium
Soccer – Ireland v Wales
Know your Sport

Talk

The Late Late Show
Kenny Live
Bibi
Secrets
Live at Three

References

- Barwise, T. P. and A.S.C. Ehrenberg, (1988), *Television and its Audience*, London: Sage.
Collins, M. A., A.S.C. Ehrenberg, and G.J. Goodhardt, (1982), *The Television Audience – Patterns of Viewing*, Hants: Aske.
Ehrenberg, A.S.C., (1990) 'The Mix of Programmes We View', *Admap*, October, 40-42.
Harper, T. (1989) 'TV and its Measurement in Ireland', *Admap*, October, 31-35
Johnson, H. (1990) 'The Mix of Programmes We View is not the Same,' *Admap*, January; 40-43.