# Video - On - Demand: Towards New Viewing Practices?

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**Abstract**[1]

In this paper, we focus on the user aspects of a specific television service, video-on-demand (VOD), offered on two platforms: TV and computer. The concept of video-on-demand has already for a long time been the subject of new media research, first in its analogue version and more recently as a digital service. The main asset of this functionality, embedded in different devices, is that it offers the ability of video content being watched at any time and thereby enables extensive ways of time shifting. Furthermore, there is a possible expansion in available content, made by professionals as well as amateurs. Therefore VOD has the technical capability to fundamentally change our viewing patterns and practices. The question is however: How does the audience domesticate this new kind of audiovisual content and (how) does it fit in with their everyday viewing practices? Based on an environmental scan consisting of an extensive literature review, this paper synthesises knowledge on existing viewing practices as well as the video on demand's new affordances. Possible shifts and interactions are investigated and new research questions are being identified.

## Introduction

Our most traditional and popular mass medium, television, is undergoing major technical changes. The digitalisation of television offers the viewer the opportunity to take over control of the broadcast scheme and become the master of his own time. If he wants, he can interact with the offered content in various ways and even become a content-producer. Next to that, the viewer is also not limited (anymore) to the television set, but can also watch TV programmes and other video content on a computer or a portable device.

In this paper we will focus in an exploratory way on the user aspects of video – on – demand offered on two platforms: TV and computer. On-demand services promise the viewer the functionality of watching any content at any preferred time, that way enabling extensive ways of time shifting. For this we will look into some of the promises VOD makes and try to contextualise them. Starting from the existing viewer practices, we will explore how and if these new affordances will lead to concrete new user practices. The question we will try to answer in this paper is: *"How do these new TV-related technologies like VOD interact with existing viewing practices?"*

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[1] This paper is work in progress. It structures some of our findings and expresses some of our thoughts in relation to video on demand and viewing practices. Please do not quote without the authors' permission.

The theoretical framework to answer this question is largely based on the domestication theory (Berker, Hartmann, Punie, & Ward, 2005; Silverstone & Haddon, 1996). On the empirical level, the research findings from an environmental scanning of existing knowledge on viewing practices and VOD will be discussed. Environmental scanning is a research technique applied specifically within institutions, in order to determine strategic planning and goals, based on understanding the external environment and the interconnections of its various sectors (Morrison, 1992). But the technique is also being used in future studies and trend watching, to provide an early warning on significant socio-technological changes and to detect 'weak signals' of new trends (Uskali, 2005). One of the methods used in environmental scanning is an extensive database literature review (Morrison, 1992), which we applied in this study. In our environmental scan, VOD is placed in a broader perspective, by looking at different contextual factors that can influence the present and future usage of VOD (time spending patterns, viewing habits, household budgets etc.). Existing data on VOD usage patterns are also being analysed.

This paper is exploratory in nature, identifying some existing trends in the use of on-demandvideo viewing and raising some concrete future research issues and questions.[2]

The specific questions we will tackle in this paper are:

- What are the existing viewing practices?
- How can viewing practices be influenced by VOD services? We will explore this possible impact on three specific areas: time, place within the home and content.

Based on this first analysis, we will define specific research questions that need to be answered in our field study.

## 1. Television's existing practices

An important idea is that technologies or products only exist in the everyday practices. The relation between product and practice is dynamic, meaning that it co-evolves. Practices exist as recognisable entities but at the same time require constant and active reproduction or performance. "*Practices show how consumers and producers change within social and material structures and how they also effect changes in these structures*" This means that practices exist as recognisable entities, but at the same time they require constant and active reproduction (Hand, Shove & Southerton, 2005). Therefore a 'practice' is seen as a routinised type of behaviour, which consists of several elements that are all interconnected to one other. It is like a way of cooking, of consuming, of working of investigating, of taking care of oneself or of others, etc. (Reckwitz, 2002). This also refers to the idea of Oudshoorn & Pinch, that there is no

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[2] This paper fits into the first phase of a research project concerning video in the home, Video Q-SAC. In this project the use and requirements of video-in-the home will be explored in-depth, with a concrete focus on on-demand video services on TV screens and specifically also on the computer, which is relatively new.

essential use to be derived from the artefact itself and that technologies should be studied in their context of use and users and technologies should be seen as co-constructed (Oudshoorn & Pinch, 2003:2).

On the meaning of TV for viewers and the existing viewing practices, many studies have been conducted (Silverstone, 1994; Bauwens, 2002; Lull, 1990). Television is the medium with the widest implementation in households. In 1948, only 0,3% of the UK population had a TV set, but by 1958, this was 52%, rising to over 90% in the 70's and reaching 99% by 1996 (Hamill, 2003). It is also a medium that is fully **domesticated**, meaning that it is completely integrated in our daily lives and habits and forms an important part of it (Silverstone, 1996).

### 1.1. Television dominance

Watching television is a **time-consuming activity**. An extensive part of our day, and more in particular of our free time, is dedicated to watching television. When people are at home in the evening and they are free, they watch television (Bauwens, 2002). This is also clearly demonstrated in people's time spending patterns. The Flemish research group TOR, found that watching TV and video is by far the most important activity people conduct in their 'free time', which can be defined as the time people can fill in with the activities they prefer. Of our total time budget, 16% is free time. In the graph below, our total free time is expressed in hours and minutes, as well as how people divide this free time in different activities. The reference period is one week. The graph shows there is a small rise in the total amount of free time people have available, with 0,23% or 32 minutes a week (TOR, 2004).

Fig. 1: total free time and free time activities expressed in hours a week (TOR, 2004)
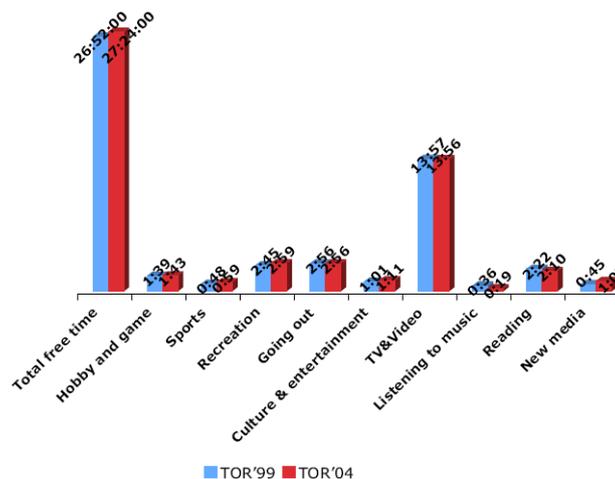
It is also clear that viewing times have stayed constant between 1999 and 2004. The total share of TV & Video in people's free time was 51,2% in 1999 and 49,8% in 2004. This means that half of people's time off, or the time they can fill in with activities they like, is filled with watching TV. The average time spent on using new media, like a personal computer and the Internet, has increased with 22 minutes, but this is still only a small share of the total free time (4%). It is also clear that the additional time spent on using new media does not come from the TV time, but from the small rise in our total free time and from the time spent on reading an listening to music which both diminished. Youngsters between 18 and 24 years old watch less television than others, which is also reflected in a smaller percentage of their total free time. However, when we look at the usage of new media in this group, with an average of 2h25 a week, this is more than in other groups, but still less than watching TV. So for these groups, watching TV is still an important activity. The group between 25 and 39 watches the least in absolute hours, but their free time is also the most limited. When we look at the average viewing times a day in Flanders, we can see that these stayed relatively constant over the years. There is even an increase, as in 1997 the average viewing time was 162 minutes per individual and per day (children included). In 2005, the average viewing time was 178 minutes a day (APS, 2006). This shows that although there are new ways of managing our TV time, an extensive part of our day and more particular of our free time is still dedicated to watching television. But despite these high viewing times, television is not regarded as a prior activity. If something else comes up, for example a visit from friends, people sacrifice their TV viewing. This is also described by Burton: *"Television is not life, although it's a part of our lives'.* It's hard for people to imagine themselves a life without TV, but there are more important things than watching TV, like social contacts (Bauwens, 2002:300).

### 1.2. Television experience

The fact that television is such an important part of our daily lives, is linked to its specific characteristic of giving **structure** and rhythm to our lives, by providing a sort of focal point for families, and acting as a sort of timetable. The time we start watching, the fixed appointments with broadcasts, all give a structure to our lives and make that watching television is a routine for most people. This is also translated in the central place TV has in the living room. The TV offers stability, not only physical, but also in the routine it provides, which makes people feel like part of the community, while watching (Silverstone, 1994; Bauwens, 2002; Peters, 2003; Taylor and Harper, 2003; Boyns & Stephenson, 2003).  The television experience is determined by viewing behaviour, the social dimension and the scale of experience.

*1.2.1 Viewing behaviour*

The aspects of structure and routine have also an impact on the way people watch television. In a way, television is an easy medium and watching television is mostly a **lean-back activity**. Watching television often means relaxing and allowing us the right to do nothing[3].

The core elements of this viewing behaviour are:

- People first make themselves available to the medium, and only then they start watching it.

- Although people watch a lot of television and the fact that this structures their evenings at home, only few programmes are perceived as a real 'must'. This means that often people choose only for the medium itself but not necessarily for a specific content.

- Even though people have certain program preferences, choosing the content happens most of the time in an irrational way. Not always the nicest, most beautiful, most attractive or most interesting programmes are being watched. Often people just switch on their television set and then they start to choose the (type of) program they want to see.. This means that the choice of the programmes that are watched, are the result of switching on the television set rather than the reason for switching it on. (Bauwens, 2002: 167-288; Pauwels & Bauwens, 2004: 83-84).

- The element of "willingness" plays an important role with regard to the viewing behaviour. 'Willing' refers to the fact that once people have made themselves available for the medium, they often keep watching, even at programmes they are not particularly satisfied with (Bauwens, 2002: 385-389). When we look at viewing figures, we can see that entertainment programmes as well as the news are the most – watched programmes.

*1.2.2 Social dimension*

Another important characterist ic is that television is still regarded as a **social activity** and a family event**.** Although there is a multiplication of TV sets in our houses, there is often still one TV-set placed central in the living room, on which programmes are being watched together. People like watching together, although this does not automatically mean that there is conversation on what they see (Bauwens, 2002).

*1.2.3. Scale of experience*

Watching television can have different levels of experience. We notice that television is often used as a **secondary activity.** More and more, TV accompanies us while we are doing other activities, like surfing the web with the TV on in the background, ironing in front of TV, reading while the TV is on etc. Therefore we distinguish three levels: (Van den Broeck et al., 2006; Lievens et al., 2007)

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[3] (Therefore viewers are often also referred to as 'couch potatoes')

- TV in the front: this is the most active form of watching television. No other activities are being performed.
- TV on the side: people are performing one or more 'primary' activities while also watching television. The latter is secondary to the other tasks.
- TV in the back: in this setting television is no more than a kind of wallpaper. There is no form of active watching at all.

TOR calculated that in 2004, TV was a side activity for an average of 2 hours a week (TOR, 2004). Peters (2003) noted that the TV set as background or wallpaper is specifically used by younger people aged 18-25, but also in other research this simultaneous use of television while conducting other activities was noted. Lull (1990) describes television in this respect as an environmental resource, creating a flow of constant background noise. He sees that television becomes a companion for accomplishing household chores and routines. This has off course an impact on on-demand viewing, as this means that our viewing behaviour is not always attentive.

Although the characteristics of television (viewing behaviour and the television dominance) indicate that it is an important part of our daily lives it is clearly not the most important aspect. These characteristics of traditional TV also suggest that the act of watching television as such seems to be more important than the content we are watching.

With these observations in mind it is interesting to look at the affordances of video – on – demand (VOD). Affordances may be defined as the combination of *'perceived and actual properties of the thing - primarily those fundamental properties that determine just how that thing could possibly be used*.' (Norman, 1988; see also Gibson, 1977; Newman, 2001; Pierson et.al, 2006). We will explore the specific affordances or inherent properties of the service as well as its possible impact on the existing viewing practices as we have summarized them.

## 2. Video – on –demand: new affordances?

The traditional viewing practices as we described above, could be influenced by new television add-ons. One of these add-ons is the feature of video-on-demand. Important to recognize is that this service is not only linked to television as such, but also to other types of platform like e.g. the computer.

### *2.1. What is video-on-demand?*

Video-on-demand as a service exists since the nineties (Ling, 1999) and refers to a technique that offers

viewers the possibility to watch what they want, when they want it. It is one of the services that enable people to time-shift, or in other words, to break loose with the existing broadcasting schedule. Technologically, video-on-demand systems provide content over a network, by sending it to a PC or a set-top-box linked to a TV-set. This can work either via downloads or streaming. The difference for the user is that with download, the entire movie or program first has to be stored on the set-top-box or the computer. With streaming, the content is streamed to the user, who can watch it immediately as the video streams starts. The latter is the main reason why the majority of the cable and telecom companies use the streaming technique when offering VOD-services.  Next to the basic functionality VOD also offers the viewer the typical video recorder (VCR) related functionalities like pausing, fast forward, rewind etc. (Rajapakshe & Quek, 1995).

A related service that also enables viewers to watch on-demand content, is the personal video recorder or PVR. This system can be used for "push video-on-demand", a service Sky will use to place additional content automatically on people's hard disk (Sky). People can also simply program their personal video recorder or PVR to record or download programmes on its hard disk. The personal video recorder is mostly linked to an electronic program guide (EPG), in that way enabling users to simply select the programmes they want to record from the EPG. Thus they can record one program, but also all episodes of a series at once. Furthermore it becomes possible to look for specific content to record, e.g. all movies with Richard Gere. The PVR also makes it possible to pause live –TV. In Europe, PVRs are available since 2000. It was announced as the replacement of the VCR, but due to high prices and its unfamiliarity, the devices had low adoption rates (Whittingham, 2000). Since the implementation of interactive digital television however, these PVRs were also integrated in set-topboxes, which will lead to a higher familiarity for TV viewers, as they are integrated in the digital television package. The common aspect in all these described systems, is that they offer viewers the potential to watch their preferred content at any time they want.

Besides VOD there is also near video-on-demand (NVOD). This is a video technique that broadcasts multiple copies of a program at short time intervals (10-20 minutes), giving viewers the opportunity to pick in every 10-20 minutes. This is a typical pay-per-view service in which people pay per program they watch.


## 2.2. Video- on – demand's possible interaction with existing viewing practices

The service of VOD intrinsically could have a great impact on the viewing patterns of people. The main question therefore is (to see) to what extent VOD interacts with existing viewing practices, keeping the characteristics as described above in mind? Technologically seen, the system of on-demand viewing entails the possibilities of managing both our time spent on watching television and the content we watch. Video-

on-demand also enables watching video content on other screens (e.g. the PC screen), that way influencing the place of the TV set in the house. Traditional broadcast television was determined by three dimensions: time, place and content. A certain type of content could only be watched at a certain time at a certain place. With VOD this interrelation between these dimensions disappears. This could even be to the extent that they become completely independent from each other. Then, any type of content can be watched at any given time at any given place. Therefore we will elaborate on these three elements in the next paragraphs.

Fig. 2: time, place and content can become independent entities
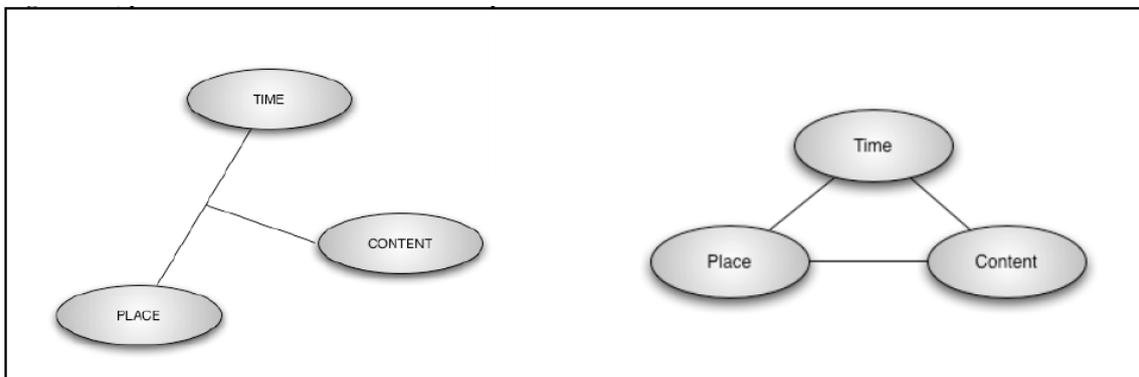


### 2.2.1. Time dimension

Video on demand entails the promise of becoming "a master of our own time", by offering the possibility to manage our own time. People can use VOD services at the timing of their choice, without the constraints of fixed broadcasting time schedules. One of the ideas is that by offering users more flexibility in organising their lives, this may lead to saving time (Haddon, 1999). Both time and money are scarce resources for many households. But as our financial budget increases over the years with the growth of the economy, our time budget never changes, as there are only 24 hours a day. In contrary, due to the 24/7 society one could have the impression that the available time seems to be decreasing. Therefore time is probably the scarcest resource for households (Punie, 2000; Hamill, 2003). The changes in time spending patterns have been researched via time use diaries over the years (Haddon, 2001; TOR, 2004). These researches show that our time management is the result of a constant balancing between different categories: commitments (e.g. work, studies, household activities; physical needs (e.g. eat and sleep), time off, social participation, time on the road and waiting (TOR, 2004).

The assumption that the development of different types of new (time-saving) technologies would provide

people with more free time cannot be taken for granted. Hamill (2003) investigated the spread of labour-saving devices in the houses. Her hypotheses that an increase of labour-saving devices in the home, like dishwashers and microwave ovens, would lead to more free time, proved to be false. Home entertainment devices like radio and television were diffused much faster than kitchen appliances. And those entertainment devices are more time-consuming rather than time saving (television, compact disk player). Particularly in lower income households, more entertainment devices than time-saving devices are present. Flemish research on TV habits showed that socially disadvantaged groups, like unemployed and elderly people, spend a lot of their time on watching television. This can be attributed to the fact that television is a relatively inexpensive time spending activity, and as already mentioned earlier, watching television offers us comfort (Bauwens, 2002).

The structural aspect of TV-viewing leads us to believe that people will not be eager to save time to watch only those programmes they prefer on-demand. The idea that people will save time using VOD services, starts from the hypotheses that people now are forced to watch programmes they don't like, for example a less preferred 'bridging' program between two programmes they do like. Using VOD, they could be able to save time by only watching the two preferred programmes, that way reducing the total time spent on TV. However, this is not likely, as television clearly forms an important part of our daily lives and the activity of watching television is often more important than the content that is actually watched (Bauwens, 2002, supra).

A. The VCR (video cassette recorder) Specific for Video on demand, is that its affordances are not new. Since the end of the 70's, a device with a similar promise already exists: the VCR (video cassette recorder). Existing research on the usage of the VCR, enables us to explore both the time dimension and the content dimension in relation to VCR user practices. When the VCR was introduced in the seventies, it was perceived as a revolutionary but costly device that would *"free viewers from the constraints of mainstream network television by making them more autonomous in their viewing decisions."* (Van den Bulck, 1999). In other words, viewers could gain control over viewing time and choice, as they could watch selective. When we look at the time dimension, we can see that one of the expectations was that VCR use would lead to a reduction of the total viewing time, as people had the possibility to time-shift and could only watch those programmes they preferred. The viewers could also better control the specific viewing conditions, as they could also use the VCR to skip commercials for example. Furthermore, it could lead to a diversification of the viewing diet, as people were also able to watch other and more content that was broadcasted on inconvenient hours. (see also Van den Bulck, 1999)

But when looking at the real usage, we noticed that the possible shifts in both time shifting and selectivity (see infra) did not occur as expected. A survey in Flanders conducted in 1994 by Van den Bulck, showed

that, although 68,8% of the respondents owned a VCR, only half of the respondents used their VCR to record programmes regularly and only a similar percentage rented tapes regularly. There was also no evidence in the data that suggested that VCR use was linked to watching a more limited number of program types or watching less television (Van den Bulck, 1999). Other studies confirmed that the increase in TV watching due to the VCR, was not very significant (Hamill, 2003).   The main reason for this all is to be found in the user practice. First, the only decision that people make is whether or not he or she wants to watch TV. (see higher) Secondly, linked to the scale of experience (see above) Hamill (2003) makes a distinction between focused and background watching. People will only record those programmes they really want to watch and many of the recorded programmes are not watched at all. Thirdly, this is also linked to the social dimension. The VCR is for example also used to reduce viewing conflicts, e.g. recording a soap and watch it later on, because other household members do not like it. (Gauntlett and Hill 1999) This illustrates that the VCR, which mainly is a time-shifting device, has no significant impact on the entire viewing experience. Instead of being used as a time management device, it was used as an additional channel in the viewing repertoire. Some people will use it actively, but for others it will be a channel they only use sporadic. (Van den Bulck, 1999).

B. The PVR (personal video recorder)

The promises the VCR made in the early eighties, giving the viewer better management of his or her viewing and a better selection of programmes, are very similar to the promises that are made today with personal video recorders (PVR) and on-demand video viewing. An important question is if these "new" ways of viewer autonomy will in fact lead to new viewing practices, or is the usage of the VCR a good prediction of the use of video-ondemand and PVRs? The PVR, was announced as the follow-up of the VCR (videocassette recorder) (Whittingham, 2000). The PVR offers the same functionalities of time-shifting, but the combination with an electronic program guide (EPG) offers an important improvement concerning usability compared to the VCR. Instead of recording programmes time-based, people can record programmes item-based, by selecting them in an EPG. It is even possible to record all episodes of a series at once. This could lead to a more extensive use of time-shifting functionality. When we look at how people perceive video-on-demand as a new technology, we can see that they relate it with two existing technologies, their TV set and their VCR (Ling, 1999) An early study of the use of a VOD system (1995-1996) focussed on the domestication of the technology in the home and more in particular on what is called the metaphorical integration in the mind of the user and the physical integration in the home and specifically into the living room. The tested VOD system was often seen as an entertainment system similar to the video player, because of its close association to TV as well because it had similar functionalities as

playing a movie and stop or rewind it. People saw it as a kind of video machine that "*you can pick and choose what you want to see*". One of the participating couples described the system as: *"I don't know how the technical system functions". It is probably just channels and videocassettes that stand there. His wife said: No, they are disks that everybody sits and looks at".* (Ling, 1999). This last remark is important, as it relates to the idea of *innovation through familiarity*, in which people have to be able to relate to something they already know (Lievens, Van den Broeck, Pierson, 2007). Next to that the study also clearly indicated that users used the VOD system at roughly the same times they used regular broadcast. The video metaphor also guided the expectations of the users of the service: they placed it in the sphere of entertainment, had specific expectations on the functioning (pause, rewind) and even had specific expectancies on pricing strategies. An important difference was that people did not have to leave the house to rent a video anymore, which was also seen as an important advantage. (*"For me it is simply that with videotorg I avoid the trip to the video store to rent a video, I get it right in my living room."*) However, this positive aspect was immediately linked to the concern that the system would lead to the impulsive ordering of movies and some people feared that it might steal time away from other activities. The test participants could use the service for free, but they did compare the service to the price of a movie in a video store. *"If the price to see a film was competitive with rental of a film in a video store that would be acceptable".* Some people in the trial also wanted to use it for a fixed fee and others would want to pay only for what they used (Ling, 1999). This relates to he findings of our own research, that people want to be in control over costs at all time (Van den Broeck, 2006).

The above findings are also being confirmed in other research on the use of hard disk recorders or PVRs for time shifting: (see SPOT, 2006; Van den Broeck, Pierson & Pauwels, 2004)

- The use of these type of devices are limited in relation to the total viewing time (only 7-8% in the Netherlands, and 13% in the UK; SPOT, 2006)
- The time-shifting element is only relative in relation to time; the delayed viewing is often consumed the same day as the original broadcast
- The option of time shifted viewing in real time is not frequently used
- When recording a program this is not so much a time shifting element, but mainly because people simply don't want to miss specific programmes.

    Recorded programmes are mostly watched the same day or one day later.

Although the most known American stand-alone PVR, Tivo, was not adopted as successful as hoped for, the user rates of Tivo's early adopters are much higher compared to the European figures, as 70% of the Tivo owners use their device on a daily bases to record and to time-shift programmes. This is mainly linked to the commercials that are interrupting programmes more often in the US, as well as the fact that Tivo is

being used more intensive, because it already exists longer in the US. (Whittingham, 2000; (Arbitron, Cable study, 2006))

Our own focus group research shows that people do appeal to the opportunity to break loose with the traditional TV system and to fit the incoming flow of content to their own needs. This is also one of the most important triggers for people to switch to digital television. People like being in control, and being able to time shift puts them in control over the existing broadcasting system. However, this will not necessarily mean that people will use the opportunity drastically. The first test with interactive digital TV in Flanders, e-VRT, showed that people do indeed shift the starting hours of their favourite programmes by means of the PVR and electronic program guide, but in their selection, they often stick to old viewing habits and taste preferences. The time span, in which they watched television, was also still the typical prime time television hours. This means that the purpose behind this program selection was not to reorganise the whole viewing evening autonomous, free from the classical broadcasting scheme, but to simply postpone prime time programmes to later on in the evening, when people had the time to watch them. (e-VRT, 2003; Van den Broeck, Pierson & Pauwels, 2004).

This overview on time-related aspects, leads us to some concrete ideas we will take into account in our further research on in-the-home video. One important finding is that for now, VOD and time-shifting is not really used to reduce the actual viewing times.

### 2.2.2. Content dimension

Another technical promise of VOD is that it enables a more personalised viewing behaviour. People will be able to adapt the broadcasting schedule to their own needs and thus watch only those specific programmes they really prefer. This is not only related to the time-shifting functionality, as described above, but people can also select only those programmes they really enjoy. The available content in that regard will be (in the future) unlimited and therefore people can personalise and adapt the existing TV broadcasting schedule. Subsequently, video on-demand can even make traditional broadcasting companies unnecessary in the future, as people can make their own choices 'à la carte' and choose between a range of series, soaps, documentaries, movies etc. Furthermore, convergence and the increase in Broadband capacity and availability have made the Internet an additional source of video content. This content entails both existing TV content (series and movies) but also a range of user generated content. People make their own movies and place them on popular sites like You Tube and my own TV, although this should not be overestimated, as only 1% produces most of the user generated content, 9% produces a little and 90% only consumes the content (Nielsen, 2006). New technologies like Windows Media Centre and Apple TV link these two different

platforms, that way enabling convergence.

A. Content selection

Important to estimate the impact of this new content dimension is the way people select their TV-programmes. The analysis of (the aspects of) our existing viewing patterns (supra) showed that the act of watching television is often more important than the content that is watched and that people not always watch only the nicest programmes. However this does not mean people never select programmes or aren't interested in watching on-demand content.

Taylor and Harper (2003), distinguished three periods of television viewing, that each have their specific selecting mechanisms regarding the content that is watched:

1. *Coming home viewing*: This period can be described as "switching on to switch off". Switch off from school or work, to start the process of relaxing. Taylor and Harper found that this viewing was highly disengaged viewing. In this period, programmes are mostly selected unplanned, by zapping through the channels. Little or no use of program guides was made in this period. The channel surfing feels like it is effortless and requires little thought. Furthermore, the channel surfing is immediately related to watching television. People are already watching, while they are surfing the channels.

2. *Mid-evening viewing*: This period often runs through dinner and lasts until 8.30-9 pm. This is what is typically called the prime-time period. In this period, there is planned viewing of specific programmes and therefore engagement is also higher. This is called viewing by appointment. These programmes are often viewed together, and they also structure the activities of people, e.g. preparing meals before the soap starts. (This relates to the routines in viewing, people know which programmes are on).

3. *Later-evening viewing:* This type of viewing takes place when all the daily chores are completed and last until 11 or 11.30 pm. This viewing has a relatively high level of engagement in the households. People then seem to have specific types of programmes they like to watch. Documentaries, current affairs programmes and dramas were popular. In this phase, program guides are often being used for short-term planning of which programmes people want to watch.

The analysis of Taylor and Harpers' three viewing periods indicates that it is especially the level of engagement that is central in the determination whether people just watch TV (according to daily routines and patterns like first the news and then a soap opera) or actively select programmes. This is also linked to the scales of experience (see higher) in watching television.

When looking at the existing user research on the VCR, and the specific relation with the selection of the content, the following outcomes can be distinguished (Van den Bulck, 1999):

1.  Viewers may watch "more of the same", e.g. they are watching action movie A and recording action movie B at the same time;

2.  Viewers could also buy, rent or record content that is not shown on television or which is not available in their normal viewing hours. It is only in this second case that VCR use leads to diversification;

3.  Viewers may also just rearrange the broadcasting schedule and that way making viewing more convenient or eliminating programming conflicts. Then the viewing diet does not change much or not at all

4.  The number of genres correlates with the amount of time that people watch television. The more viewers watch television, the number of genres they watch increases. Only for heavy viewers, this is the opposite.

The findings above may suggest that VCR usage mainly leads to a diversification of the viewing diet and that people who use their VCR a lot, watch more television. However, Van den Bulck warns that, it is also possible that the findings merely suggest that heavy viewers of television are also heavier users of the VCR, as also suggested by other authors  (Van den Bulck, 1999).


A. Content experience

Another important content related aspect, also with regard to 'experience' as well as to the social dimension, is that unlike watching television, watching video is perceived as an event unto itself. The idea that a movie was something else than just a TV broadcast was also expressed in the Videotorg trial (Ling, 1999). Although video could not be compared to watching a film in a cinema, it was perceived as a special social event. Watching video could be seen as a pseudo-film experience that has developed its own social identity. Ling et al refer to the use of food, the video selection process, the invitation of friends and even the scheduling of time for the session that distinguishes it from normal broadcast TV. (Ling, 1999). This is important for VOD, as this means that people will probably choose on-demand movies in a different way than they choose on-demand programs. This could also haven an impact on people's willingness to pay for VOD. People are already used to pay for movies (video rental, movie theatre), but not for episodes of TV series (Van den Broeck, 2006).


B. Internet: the new challenge

The Internet could be perceived as the absolute video-on-demand system. It enables the users complete control on the three basic dimensions of VOD as mentioned above. Furthermore, the border between television and computer is becoming vague. Television sets are already being used as computers and vice

versa. Next to that, we also notice a change in time-consuming activities, especially among youngsters, who are using the Internet more often (TOR, 2004).

Online video, or watching video via the computer, has become a common practice in the last few years. In the US, the majority of the online population (69%) already watched online video (OPA, 2005). It is not only youth that watches online video. The majority of online viewers are male, and the age group between 35-54 accounts for 45% of all online video viewing. In relation to content, we notice that although the amount of available content on the Internet seems to be unlimited, there are two major differences with traditional TV-viewing:

1.  The personal computer is used to watch other content than traditionally watched on TV. News is the most watched genre online, although sports fragments are watched the most frequently. Movie clips and video clips are the second and third most watched genres. Online viewers are particularly interested in original content, exclusive for the Internet and not available on other media as TV en DVD (OPA, 2005; OPA, 2006).

2.  Online video should be short, for news, movie clips and sport highlights 1-2 minutes is the ideal length, for music clips 3-5 minutes is preferred (OPA, 2005; OPA, 2006).

But the Internet also has another major challenge in terms of content: user generated content. User generated content is a quite new evolution and is strongly enabled by numerous Web 2.0 applications and services. The most well-known and popular service distributing user-generated content, is Google's You Tube. Each day more than 100 million movies from different genres are being watched via this website only. As within most online communities, also for You Tube the Nielsen principle of 1% of users contributing a lot, 9% contributing a little and 90% only consume content is valid (Markus & Hannu, 2006; Nielsen, 2006). An important question is how this user generated content will evolve in the future, and which place it will take in existing viewing patterns.

### 2.2.3. Place dimension

A last dimension, on which on-demand services can have an impact, is the place dimension. For long, television was placed central in the living room, as a gathering point for all family members. This embedded aspect of television in our living room, goes back to the fifties, when the living room was the only room in the house that was heated (Hamill, 2003). Nowadays this is no longer the case.

Today many households have more than one TV-set (29,4% of Belgian households has more than one TV-set; IP, 2005) and television sets can be found all around the house. The multiple TV sets in the house can be found in public as well as in private spaces like children's bedrooms, parents' bedrooms, hobby rooms,

and even kitchens and bathrooms. A Flemish research on the use of television in the bedrooms, showed that 30% has a TV-set in the bedroom. This means that our bedroom has a new function, it becomes a place to relax and escape of the stress of the everyday life[4].  This is also related to changes in experience as well as to the social dimension (see above).

TV-sets are omnipresent in the house, but there is not only a multiplication of TV-sets, also other screens in the house can and are being used to watch video content. The multimedia computers of today in combination with Broadband connectivity make that computer screens can be used as TV screens as well. People can use their computer to watch all kinds of video content (see also above). As illustrated above, on – demand services provide additional content at any time, expanding the range of programmes that can be watched on the different screens present in the house. Past research showed that the additional TV-sets in the house were used as an "emergency device". The best equipped TV-set was still to be found in the living room, but the additional sets were used in so-called emergency situation, for example a football match that only the husband wants to see or for the children Besides this, most programmes were still watched in the domestic and social context of the living room (Bauwens, 2002).

Although outside the scope of this research, it is also important to recognise that the practice of watching television is also being transferred outside the home. This means that in this 'new' mobile society, due to mobile devices, the Internet etc., television seems to be everywhere. More than traditional television sets, mobile television is emphasising on interactivity, including video-on-demand. Research has already showed that this mobile evolution not necessarily means that this is an addition to watching television on a regular TV-set. One of the places where mobile television is being used is precisely in the home. (Södergard, 2003) Next to that, because of the intrinsic capacities of mobile television, new viewing patterns for these devices impose. Question here is to what extent this will influence traditional or existing viewing patterns.

The expansion of available channels and content, promises the evolution towards more fragmented viewing practices. An important question in this regard to incorporate in our future research is if television is still able to hold its social character. And how will these additional screens be used in the future? How does the increasing number of potential television screens influence the traditional practice of watching television on the living room television?

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[4] This is based on a research conducted by Herman Konings, a Belgian trendwatcher who runs the company called nXt (www.nXt.com), for the 'Sleepy' company.

### 3. Conclusion

When looking at the existing user practice of TV-viewing, two elements seem to be of importance: the television dominance and the television experience. The first element refers to the fact that television is domesticated in such a way that it is a major part of our daily life practices, not to say a dominant part. The second element refers to how people experience television. This is influenced by their viewing behaviour, the social dimension as well as the scale of experience of TV-viewing.

When video-on-demand (VOD), (and with that, new kinds of audiovisual content), wants to be fitted in everyday viewing patterns, it has to interact with those two elements. To do so, the three major dimensions on which VOD has an impact have to be taken into account: time, content and place. Video-on-demand after all enables people to see what they want, where they want, at any time.

The environmental scan has also indicated that some very specific elements are important with regard to the domestication of VOD. First on demand services offers people the opportunity to watch the content they want to watch, in a relatively simply manner. A major advantage of the on demand system is that it relates quite well to something people already know (VCR) and more important of which they already have some user experience and practices. Earlier research found that *innovation through familiarity* is important for the uptake of new services or applications. Secondly people want to feel that they are in control. They want to have the option to time -shift and the option to watch specific content when they want it, but this does not mean that they will use it intensively. People like having choice and options, but they are not always willing to use these options actively. The convenience, the comfort and perhaps also the social aspect of TV viewing makes that live-TV is still popular. As in other research on the use of new technology, this is also linked to the idea that *old habits die hard.* People don't change their habits overnight, but there is a gradual shift towards new user practices, as a result from a constant interaction between the user and the technology. Thirdly, we notice an enormous expansion of available content. This has two-sides for users. The increase of content leads to *more choice*, which is something people like. On the other hand, this could also lead to '*choice fatigue*', as people can have too many options and that way loose control. An important role will be for gatekeepers. For television, this will probably be the TV-channels, that give people an indication of the type of content and quality they can expect. For online video, there will probably be a growing need for content aggregators that give people control over the available content.

In order to fully understand the interaction between video-on-demand services and existing viewing practices, many elements, (enablers as well as barriers) still have to be identified. Therefore an important focus of further research should be on the gradual shift in user practices.

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