

wing? Model building scale? And, in any case, is this not another or not my point is taken here, it is portance than asking why it should be desirable to understand St Paul's than model, to appreciate Mozart than to write understand Velasquez than to try to paint, for White suggests this—to watch George o kick a football? White seems to want, like it a logical point, derived from what human. But why? How do I know more if by the appreciation than by the act? ms forgotten is that the subject of appreciate the result of an act, or is itself an act, skates over the fact that, for example, ates it is almost impossible to conceive could understand mathematics without and can one understand what it is to be ut being involved in moral situations? If flowed here (is it by White?) why drive tween creation and appreciation in the ere?

doubt that many of these points need working out and that there will be great m case to case. But it is exactly White's ration which I attack; I do not wish to ounter-model in which participation is wide variation in the "right" balance or different individuals.

criticism of White's position is his ow that whereas initiation is required ic forms of understanding within his ic is not elsewhere. It is true that he e out teaching within the voluntary ut he seems to regard it here as a frill idable in the compulsory area.

is a contingent connection it is a nt one; does it really just so happen hose things which must be learned are ave to be taught? It looks much more e alleged connection is being put for-essary one. But what are the grounds y should one hold that the arts are ble unless one is taught how to engage ricket and cookery (the examples used not?)

cially doubtful when it is remembered ing in the arts," White actually means tures, listening to music, and so on, inting or playing the flute. On the face seem that it is just absurd to suggest ooking at a picture it is incomprehen- nitation into the canons of art while het—I am at a complete loss to know ld just pick up cricket and cookery. eeds help in refining one's apprecia- is but one needs help too in refining ion of the execution of late cuts or of lamb cutlets.

iticism of White is that he is much n the bounds of his categories. Initia- inum not an achievement; being a mplex web of more and less, not a n; children are more or less skilled nt at a variety of things and in a ; there is no sharp distinction between and participating; there is no clear etween those areas where a human lerstand and those where it does not fightest whether he does or does not incidentally White's cursory dismis- education—without any argument; way of packaging subjects into those force be taught and those which can

ld this view I have to allow a vast pragmatism and particularism in White's simple distinctions would it that is the price of analysing the situation rather than substituting als for it.

THE RATINGS GAME: WHO REALLY WATCHES TV?

Television—especially now—is besotted by audience figures. Yet, as an opinion researcher points out, reliable knowledge is very thin.

The intimate relationship television has with its audience is one between semi-strangers. Jam manufacturers know from market research and panel testing the popularity of flavours, the preferred consistencies, the most acceptable packaging and labels. They are probably better informed than the average producer in that other branch of the confectionery industry, television.

Even the market for the message is open to dispute. Towards the end of last year, JICTAR, the commercial system's measurement service, was claiming 56 per cent of the total audience for ITV. The BBC's audience research service was giving just over half of total viewing time to the corporation. JICTAR consistently found more viewing hours per day devoted to commercial television than to BBC1 and BBC2 combined. The corporation saw audiences for its "average" programmes as slightly larger than the opposition's. The viewing ratios for December were assessed as 54:46 for commercial by JICTAR and 48:52 by BBC audience research. Differences of analysis and method produce different conclusions.

From the first, the BBC has opted for audience measurement by interview survey. It now uses a daily quota sample of 2,250. Concern with total population weights the results slightly towards the corporation since 200,000 of the 16,890,000 television homes in Britain receive no commercial broadcasts and an unknown number of others must get a picture poor enough to discourage viewing.

The very process of interviewing may introduce a deference bias into the results. Interviewers identify themselves as from the corporation, and a small but unmeasurable proportion of interviewees may be anxious to please their inquisitor or to gain status in his eyes. The BBC still has an aura of institutional respectability which commercial channels somehow lack.

Independent television began with three systems of audience measurement but eventually settled down to one. JICTAR, now let on contract to Audits of Great Britain. Concerned only with those who have the power of choice because they can get two or more channels, Audits of Great Britain provides a quota sample of 2,650 households with a monitor, recording whether the set is on and which channel it is switched to. Research comparing the advantages of interviewing and monitoring has proved inconclusive beyond the indication that recall in interviews tends to favour peak-time programmes. However, it is clear that the monitoring system poses certain problems peculiar to commercial television.

Though larger than the BBC sample, 2,650 is still too small. Where the corporation is concerned with a national audience, in the federalism of ITV the regional audience is the prime preoccupation. At this level, samples are inadequate: 350 speak for the 4,200,000 television homes in London and the other samples range down to five which consist of 200 sets and four which consist of a mere 100. The programme companies and their clients are taking decisions of considerable commercial importance on samples which would hardly be considered by a university social scientist.

As against BBC research, commercial television's service includes its built-in bias. There is no measure of the proportions of monitored sets attentively watched or blaring their messages into empty rooms or to all those dimensions of human activity which American monitoring experiments indicate as going on in front of the television. In single-channel situations, water consumption figures record the heavy demand of filling kettles and flushing toilets

during commercial breaks. And recall figures reveal the drop in viewing figures for some types of programme. Neither trend emerges in the JICTAR graphs. If one makes the assumption that unwatched sets biare on mainly in homes lower down the social scale then this phenomenon must create a bias to the commercial television which such homes are more likely to be tuned to.

Monitoring has been occasionally supplemented in the commercial system, but never seriously questioned. Its main purpose is to provide information for advertisers who are concerned not so much with the impact of programmes as with the more basic figure of how many homes are open to a commercial message at any one time. Ten times as much money is spent on television audience research as on newspaper readership surveys. For that money the advertisers get something not dissimilar to a readership figure, with all the faults that has.

JICTAR gives its results in terms of homes watching, while the BBC counts heads watching. Either gives a crude guide to the popularity of programmes. Taking JICTAR's Top Twenty for the five weeks falling into the November of 1969 and the year before, the following pattern emerges:

% IN TOP TWENTY		
programme type	1968	1969
comedy series and comedians	19	31
police series	12	13
Coronation Street	10	10
News at Ten	15	16
light entertainment	17	4
documentaries and current affairs	5	7
films	7	3
plays	5	4
Opportunity Knocks	2	5
miscellaneous and other	8	7
total	100	100

Add together the show business, light entertainment and spectacular programmes, and you see that just over half fall into this time-filling type, and several of the popular plays and films could also be included. News and current affairs account for nearly a quarter of the homes watching, which is a real increase on the situation ten years ago.

A more dramatic change over this period has been the intrusion of a number of BBC programmes into the ITV ratings. Both this incursion, and the increase in the BBC's proportion of viewers from 30 per cent to 50 per cent over the same time, appear to have occurred, not because of a growing desire for "quality" programmes, but because the corporation started to fight commercial television on its own ground by producing similar programmes and doing them as well as the traditional purveyors. Yet the BBC's success graph appears, for the moment, to have peaked in 1968. The proportion of BBC programmes in the Top Twenty has declined from two fifths in November 1968 to a quarter in the same month of 1969 as commercial television recovered initiative.

As for BBC2 it never features in the Top Twenty, since only two fifths of the population can receive it. Yet even among the UHF public, it only occasionally becomes the majority choice and would not feature often in a Top Twenty restricted to three-channel sets. Most of the time, the BBC2 audience is under 5 per cent of the UHF public. It rises to over a tenth of those with UHF sets only for a few programmes such as *High Chaparral*, which can reach over a quarter, *Laugh-In* (an eighth) or Saturday's *Midnight Movie*, which competes with blank screens elsewhere.

This ratings league is partly an exercise in self



Peter Brookes

fulfilling prophecy. Peak viewing time shifts with the light—forward in winter, back in summer—but inclusion in the crucial 7.30 pm to 10.30 pm zone is an almost indispensable prerequisite for admission to the league. Only a few programmes like *Opportunity Knocks* at 6.45 pm and *This is Your Life* at 7 pm are on the frontiers. A programme is also judged by the company it keeps. Advance switch-on for, or inheritance from, a popular programme can exert a considerable influence. Finally the purist can object that the ratings league represents only choice within a very narrow universe of programmes and contexts which others see fit to make available, rather than a genuine assessment of what people actually want.

These disadvantages can never be completely offset. They can be reduced by supplementing the Top Twenty with the so-called s-test—s standing simply for switching on, off or over. After all, television executives, like latter-day Sir Edward Greys, are obsessed with the prospect of cathode lights going off all over England. This process is best measured by bsc figures, because recall charts a switching off of attention, which may not affect the set itself.

Something like two thirds of a programme's audience can be inherited from its predecessor, so that it is clear that programmes get into the Top Twenty for three main reasons. Some are born to greatness, like the Miss World Contests or the *Royal Variety Show*; others achieve greatness in the fashion of *Opportunity Knocks*, which can increase the audience by over a third; others, like *World in Action*, have greatness thrust upon them because of the size of the preceding audience.

Pending sophisticated measurement, it does seem clear that in the period before 7 pm, when both channels set out to attract viewers under the impression that they will hold at least some for the night, the bsc has some initial advantages. Its children's programmes, its 5.50 pm news, and its Saturday sport, often outdraw the opposition. Until the 5.50 pm tnn bulletin is drastically improved, tnn has only the compensation of regional magazines which, outside London and Tynes Tees, usually get better ratings than their bsc counterparts.

Given the substantial degree of inertia involved in viewing habits, actually losing viewers is quite a considerable achievement for a programme. Politics emerge as among the biggest viewer-losers. Party politicals on bsc regularly lose around a third of the audience for the preceding programme, while the Prime Minister's 1969 interview with Robert McKenzie also brought a third of the audience to its feet to switch off or over. Cultural programmes are also audience-losers—though they are not screened at peak times, so this effect is mainly seen in an acceleration of normal loss.

Current-affairs programmes, however, make the effect clear at peak time. *Panorama*, which may have more in common with the techniques of embellishing than television, regularly loses up to a third of the audience for the previous programme. *World in Action* drops proportionately more, since it inherits the *Coronation Street* peak: what Granada has given Granada can take away. *This Week* could manage to lose half the audience when *News at Ten* and *Dewey* came before it. Small wonder that, with the main channels screening current affairs, bsc2 enjoys its largest audience of the week on Monday at 8 pm. It has even managed to get more ufr viewers than the total number of viewers won by both the others combined at that time.

Nationwide began its career by dropping almost a third of the regional magazine audience, or almost half of the audience for the bsc's 5.50 pm news, and this at a time of night when commercial audiences are steadily building up. This rate of loss has now been checked, but it still hovers up to a seventh of the magazine audience and a fifth of the news audience. The loss is, however, nationwide. At the other end of the evening, while *News at Ten* can slightly increase the audience, perhaps because of an ingrained British habit, fathered by war and

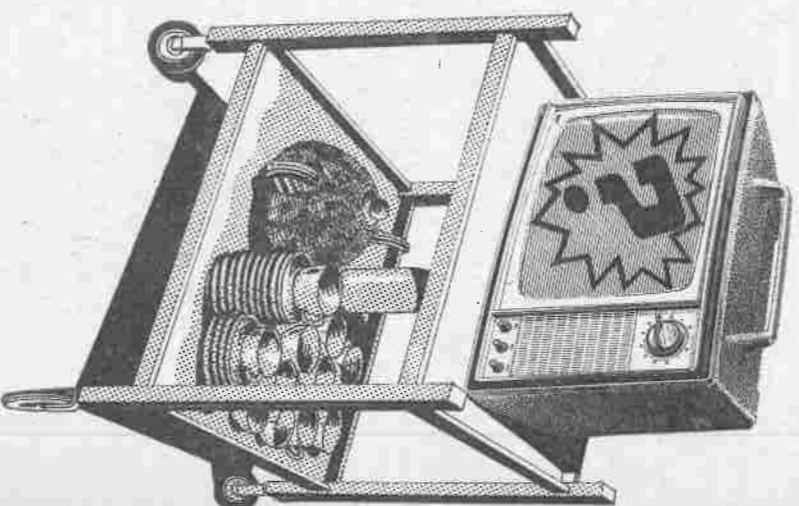
fostered by radio, of ritually turning on for news bulletins at fixed times, *Twenty Four Hours*, a product of ppe graduates for ppe graduates, never did the same at 10 pm and inevitably loses viewers at 10.30.

Faulty as the Top Twenty, and the rates of loss and gain, are for audience measurement, they constitute the only substantial guides. The supplements are not yet numerous. The bsc has its "reaction index," expressed in percentage terms and measuring the likes and dislikes of sections of a regular panel of some 3,000.

This can be used to indicate attitudes to a programme uninfluenced by its scheduling or viewing figures. Indeed, the "reaction index" and the ratings can contradict each other: *In a Class of Their Own* managed a reasonable reaction index while losing half its initial audience. Recently the highest indexes have gone to such varied spectacles as Apollo flights, the British Legion Festival of Remembrance or the Horse of the Year Show, all of which managed over 70. Low figures have gone to the more daring plays, to party politicals and to such unfortunate regulars as Bobby Gentry or Ken Dodd.

A measure of reactions could be useful. The present one has serious disadvantages. Panels and postal replies are inherently weighted towards the middle class (hence Tory party politicals rate better than Labour's, bsc programmes on average better than tnn), the dutiful, the concerned (cultural programmes have reaction indexes completely belied by their ratings), the middle-aged (pop programmes rarely get good reaction indexes and *Top of the Pops* languishes) and the conventional (innovating programmes suffer disproportionately: experimental theatre, Tony Palmer documentaries and new programmes all rate low. *Monty Python's Flying Circus* started with a very poor reaction index and took some weeks to build itself up to a respectable figure).

A commercial television counterpart of this system, "television questions," was introduced in 1964 but later dropped through lack of support. It has now been replaced by "Television Opinion Panel," the most sophisticated approach to audience research so far made. Reports in the first six months have been based on panels of 300-400 in London, Lancashire and central Scotland. Where the bsc panel is unrepresentative, because volunteer, these are selected by random sample procedures and further weighted in analysis, though inevitably wastage is substantial



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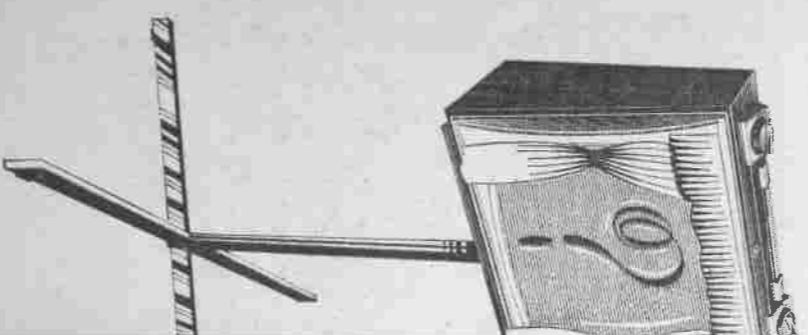
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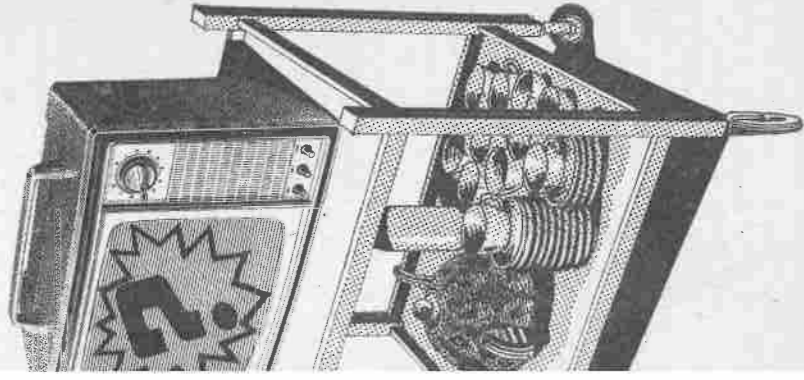
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radio, of ritually turning on for news (ed times, *Twenty Four Hours*, a programme for PPE graduates, never did 0 pm and inevitably loses viewers at the Top Twenty, and the rates of loss for audience measurement, they convey substantial guides. The supplements numerous. The BBC has its "reaction index" in percentage terms and measuring dislikes of sections of a regular panel

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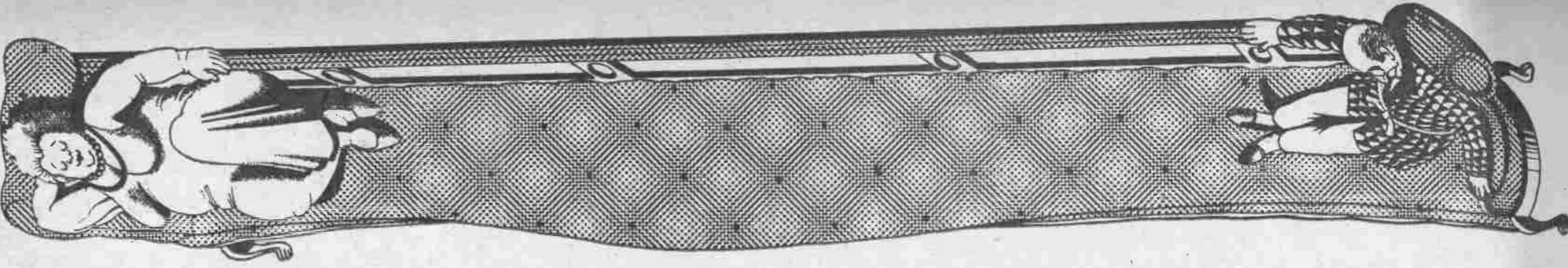
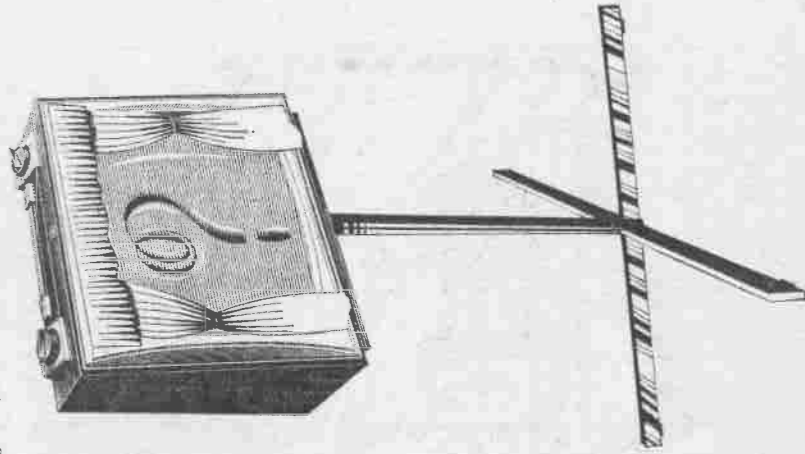
TOP aims to break away from the "letters to the editor" school of panel research by providing quantifiable data which can be used as a basis for constant comparisons. A simpler "appreciation index" has also been developed in a six-point scale, ranging from 100 ("boring") to 600 ("absorbing"), though "irritating" intrudes itself from another dimension at the 300 level. This index allows of a popularity poll, or top twenty, independent of the ratings. Just how independent it can be is indicated by the fact that over half the most popular programmes attracted less than a fifth of the audience. Few of them were in the Top Twenty league. Some that are, like the *Dustbinmen*, rate very low on the appreciation index.

After its six-month trial run, TOP is now in recess while its material is analysed and its future assessed. Though its effectiveness will only become clear when the analysis is complete, it has clearly indicated a profitable avenue of progress. Unfortunately some of the commercial companies are hardly convinced of the case for jogging along it.

Further information comes from audience breakdowns by such variables as sex, age and class. Here the personal interview method provides a finer differentiating tool than JICSTAR's monitors, even when the monitors are supplemented by the somewhat inadequate household viewing diaries. Perhaps the most interesting information comes on class, differently measured by each channel.

Predictably, the higher social groups favour the BBC, the lower ones ITV. This trend in itself helps to account for some of the regional differences in viewing habits. Granada is entrenched in Lancashire, not because of its defiantly northern posture but because 40 per cent of the audience is in the D and E social groups, compared with 26 per cent in London. Within one channel, the most marked differences of viewing habits occur on such programmes as *Coronation Street*, *Opportunity Knocks*, *Crossroads* or *Stars on Sunday*. All are popular with the D and E groups; much less so with the A, B and C's. The gaps are smallest for sport and for commercial television's prestige programmes, *News at Ten*, *Avengers*, *Power Game of This Week*. Yet, to an unknown degree, these differences arise from the timing of viewing, for the D and E groups begin to watch earlier.

On such very shaky foundations rests television's knowledge of its audience. The situation is akin to running a jam factory while knowing only jam-



making techniques and retail turnover. Moreover, within each channel, audience research and production are institutionally compartmentalised, and spill-over is slight.

At the production level, programmes are largely shaped by concepts of what makes "good television." Audiences tend to be assessed on the basis of crude hunches. An example is the assumption that before 7 pm an audience which is eating, pottering or settling down has to be hit or hooked into watching. The hunch after 10 pm is that there is a switch-off point early in a programme during which viewers make a conscious decision between carrying on watching or going to bed—hence a programme needs a strong initial impact.

Neither of these assumptions has been tested. Both have led to some curious programme policies: programmes before 7 pm and after 10 pm have been subject to more substantial and frequent changes than the hallowed peak time rituals. Examples are the BBC's Monday, Wednesday and Friday shows, all rapidly superseded, or Granada's decision to substitute the *Beverley Hillsbillies* for regional service.

Even the household habits of the British people have not been examined since 1961 when the BBC surveyed *The People's Activities*. Naturally every producer has his own views of what people want but television people are an insulated section of the community in their plate-glass towers. In any case, following individual hunches can lead either to the commercial success of Granada's *Dustbinmen* or the relative failure of Yorkshire's *Castle Haven*.

At a higher level of decision-making, there is continuous concern with ratings. Programmes certainly live or die by them. Yet neither the detailed information, nor knowledge of the appropriate reservations and techniques, is available at this level. The process of analysis tends frequently to be a crude totting up.

The extent and effect of ignorance about the audience was most strikingly demonstrated in the 1967 allocation of new contracts. The follies of the London Weekend and Harlech prospectuses were made necessary, not by understanding of the audience but by the need to appeal to the ITV, a body of middle-class dignitaries preoccupied with improving the image of the commercial system. Knowledge of viewing trends and of the importance of habit might have minimised the dismay when changed schedules, new companies and a technicians' strike brought the ratings down. It might also have slowed the speed of the backpedal into a more directly "commercial" approach which has brought *This is Your Life* and Michael Miles quizzed back to the screen, and filled Sunday night with variety shows not totally dissimilar to the London Palladium days.

Perhaps a plea for greater knowledge is a counsel of perfection. Certainly no one would suggest patterning programmes on an identikit formulation of public preferences. Yet it is clear that the available information on public preferences and attitudes is unsatisfactory (though not as unsatisfactory as our knowledge of the impact and effects of television). It is also clear that at points where producers grope for guidance, none is available. They are thrown back on their own instincts or on tried and trusted precedents. For a dynamic new industry television has a large weight of habit, inertia and ritual.

More knowledge could, of course, be subversive. It could indicate that in concentrating on popular programmes at peak periods, planners are aiming at a lowest common denominator rather than at a definite preference. It could, perhaps, unveil an audience which is an accumulation of specialised groups and interests rather than a simple mass, the kind of audience which a layer-cake structure would serve better than the broad, undifferentiating approach of competitive television. It could indicate interests and demands uncatereed for, while habit and safety keep old faithfuls marching on. Alternatively it could, in every case, reaffirm the status quo. Until the knowledge is available no one can say.