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Networks Battle with the Internet and Cable for Viewers

For the past 10 to 15 years, network television viewership has continued to decline, according to Nielsen statistics. Nationwide, major network viewership was down another 8% last year and football ratings, in particular, showed considerable erosion.



(According to recent cable subscription figures, about 65% of households across the country receive cable. This is a 45% increase over the past six years. And by the year 2000, it's predicted that 76% of U.S. households will have cable.)

The networks dispute these numbers, citing survey inaccuracies and ongoing problems at the Nielsen company. However, Nielsen researchers believe

that decreases in viewership are due to changes in people's lifestyles. One such change is the integration of the Internet into everyday life. Viewers are spending more time browsing around cyberspace instead of watching television.

In addition, the networks' desire to focus on specific demographics (adults 24-54 or 18-49) has resulted in very similar nightly programming... with sitcom competing against sitcom and drama competing against drama. Viewers looking for alternatives are forced to tune into cable or tune out altogether. Nationally, cable viewership was up about 10% for the same period. This is an increase of 2.6 million viewers, according to the Cable Television Advertising Bureau's analysis of Nielsen data.

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