

# Television as a Diversion Device

TOMOMUNE Yumiko and HARA Yumiko

“At that hour? Of course the TV is on.” This is a popular response to questions in program survey interviews. Even though a television surely gets turned on by someone, people invariably respond simply that “the TV is on” as if it had turned on of its own accord.

This form of expression says a lot about the nature of television viewing today. Viewers tend to turn the television on unconsciously, rather than make a conscious decision to watch something in order to acquire certain information or watch a story in which they can become emotionally involved. It is almost as though the television set turns itself on without human intervention. Rather than reflecting deliberate plan or intent to watch a particular program, viewing habits suggest that many people turn on the television because they don't have anything special to do and know that they can pleasantly divert themselves by watching TV. They may also feel it is too quiet with the TV off, and think there may be something interesting on, so they just turn it on to see.

In this essay, we call this viewing attitude “diversion viewing” and discuss how it has encouraged the incorporation into programs of many types of entertainment-enhancing elements originally limited to “variety programs.”

## TELEVISION AS “ENVIRONMENT APPLIANCE”

By 1964, televisions were found in three out of four Japanese homes, and the diffusion rate was 75.9 percent.<sup>1</sup> Individuals born in 1961 were three years old at the time, old enough to be aware of their surroundings. According to population estimates for 2001, the ratio of persons born before 1961 to those born after 1961 is 52:48.<sup>2</sup> By this reckoning, almost half of all Japanese as of 2001 had a television in their houses by the time they were three years old. Quite a long time has passed, therefore, since television became a standard fixture of the home. For most people television is like a friend, and they do not think of it as anything special.

<sup>1</sup> NHK Yearbook 1964.

<sup>2</sup> Based on approximate figures from the Statistics Bureau, Ministry of Public Management, Home Affairs, Posts and Telecommunications, July 2001.

### Increasing Viewing Time

According to the NHK Nationwide Personal Viewer Ratio Survey of June 2001, Japanese watch an average of 3 hours and 51 minutes of TV per day, an amount that has been increasing gradually since 1985 (Figure 1). Although one might expect that media diversification, changes in lifestyle, and more varied ways of spending leisure time would lead to a decline in viewing time, why are people, on the contrary, spending more time watching TV today?

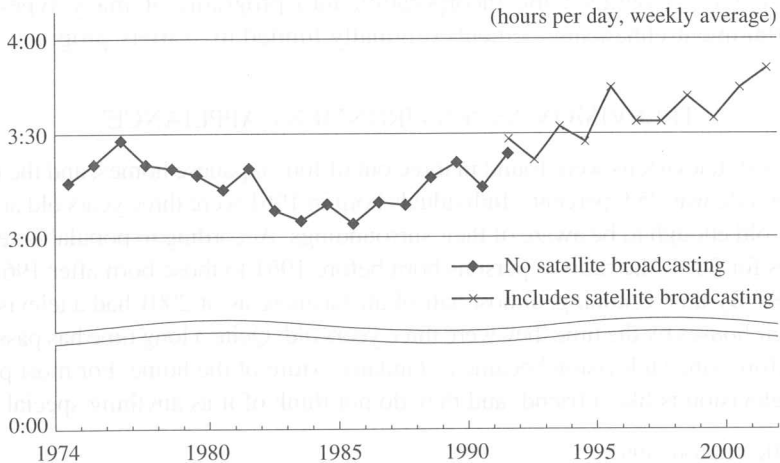
Possible explanations for the gradual rise in viewing time include the increase in leisure time due to the adoption of the five-day work week and the aging of the population, resulting in a larger ratio of older people with more free time. If increased free time has led to more time spent watching television, one can expect more viewers to use television as an entertainment and recreation device for relaxing and recovering from a day's fatigue, rather than for acquiring information in a conscious, directed fashion.

### When Someone Is Home, the TV Is On

Figure 2(a) shows the home-and-awake ratio (the ratio of people who are at home and awake) and the TV viewer ratio (the ratio of people at home watching TV) in 30-minute segments beginning at midnight weekdays, for people in the Kanto region in the NHK National Time Use Survey conducted in October 2000.

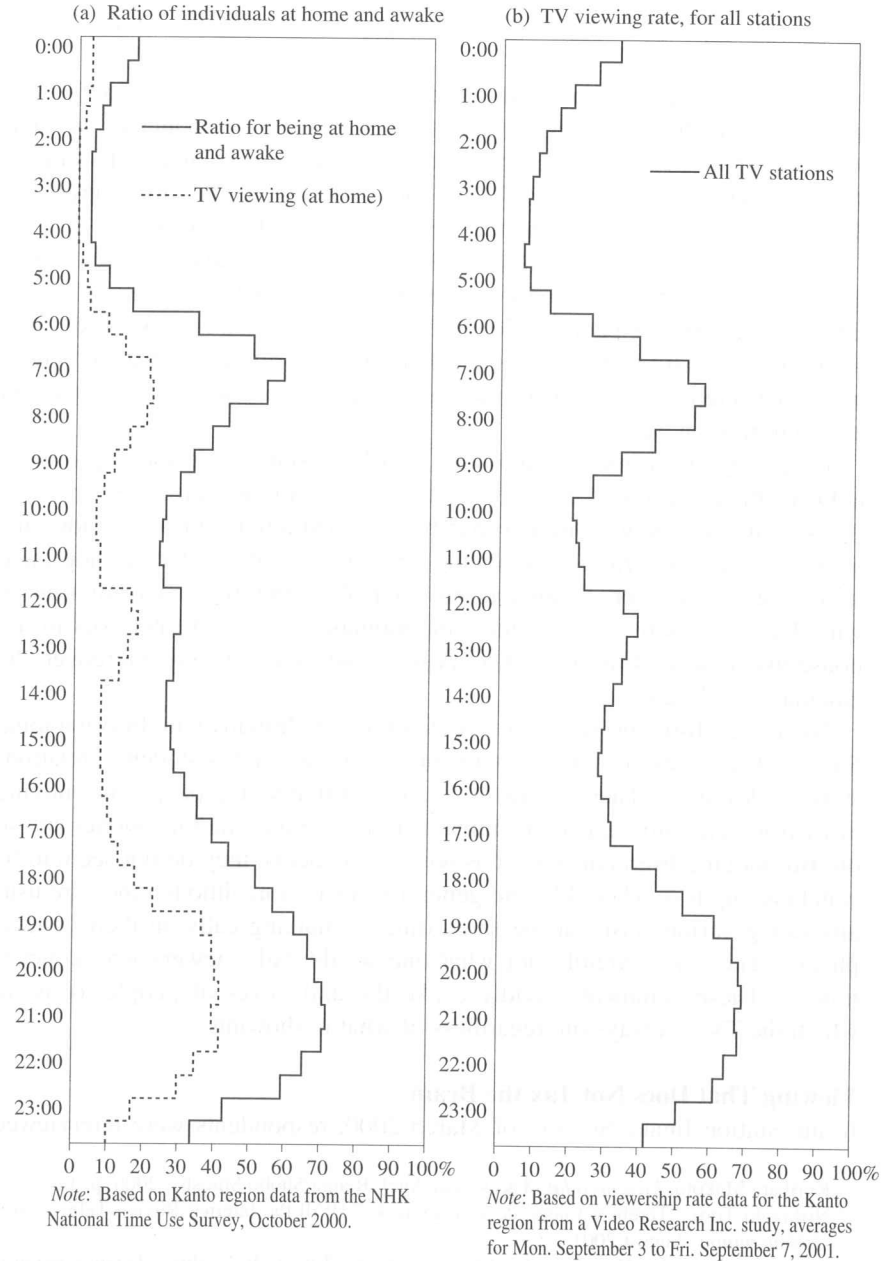
Figure 2(b), based on Kanto region household viewer rates from Video

**Figure 1. Changes in Time Spent Viewing TV**



Note: Based on NHK's June Nationwide Personal Viewing Rate Study.

**Figure 2. Ratios for Individuals at Home and Awake and TVs Switched On**



Research Inc., which tracked total viewing of all TV channels per day (generally corresponding to the ratio of TVs turned on), averaged out between Monday, September 3 and Friday, September 7, 2001, is also shown in 30-minute segments.

No direct comparison of these surveys should be made, given that the survey period, method (a: diary-style; b: mechanical), and respondents (a: individuals; b: households) differ. However, it is worth noting that the curve in (a), showing the ratio of people at home and awake, resembles to a surprising degree the curve in (b) showing the viewing rate for all stations.

Although the dotted line in (a) shows that the individual TV viewer rate accounted for an average of only 40 percent of individuals at home and awake, this was the ratio for people who were watching television consciously. It is likely that the ratio of time the television set in the household was turned on was much higher, even though the individual was not watching or was not concentrating on watching.

Regarding television viewing today, Kurihara Makoto (currently professor at Okayama Prefectural University), a television programs producer for many years, writes as follows: "Rather than being a medium, television is more like a familiar piece of furniture. 'I' am the one who turns it on, channel-hops, and turns it off. Most often, I watch absentmindedly, rather than concentrating on what I am watching . . . but since this miniature 'movie theater' sits in my house like a piece of furniture, I never leave the theater, where, moreover, the cinema is on 24 hours a day."<sup>3</sup>

Nishigaki Toru, professor at the Interfaculty Initiative in Informational Studies, University of Tokyo, comments as follows on his students' relationship to television. "There seems to be a rumor that young people are moving away from television, due to the impact of video games, mobile phones and so on. But judging from conversations with my students, they do not seem to be watching any less. Their TVs are generally always on, although they are usually doing various tasks at the same time, or making calls on their cellular phones. They are certainly not what one would call 'viewers who concentrate.'"<sup>4</sup> These comments vividly evoke the daily lives of people today, in which the TV is always on, regardless of what is showing.

### Viewing That Does Not Tax the Brain

In the Station Image Survey<sup>5</sup> of March 2000, respondents were interviewed

<sup>3</sup> Kurihara Makoto, *Eizo no jidai* [The Visual Age], Renga Shobo Shinsha, 2000, p. 12.

<sup>4</sup> Nishigaki Toru, "Terebi wa netto de yomigaeru ka" [Will the Internet Revive Television?], *Gekkan minpo*, August 2001.

<sup>5</sup> Tomomune Yumiko, Hara Yumiko, Shigemori Maki, Takahashi Yoshie, "Terebi o meguru

about what they considered important when choosing TV programs to watch. Results (multiple answers), in descending order of frequency, were “to learn about what’s going on in the world” (64 percent), “to acquire useful information” (63 percent) and “to acquire useful knowledge” (53 percent). Other than “because I can laugh,” which was in fourth place, the top three answers had to do with acquiring information or knowledge.

In the same study, a questionnaire including a list of TV programs was left with respondents, who were asked to circle those they watched in their entirety and to select answers (multiple responses) concerning their motivation for watching those programs (same choices in the interview regarding points considered important when choosing programs). But even though the same individuals were filling out the questionnaire, their answers were notably different than those they had given describing their attitudes in the interview.

Top in terms of “motivation for watching programs in their entirety” in that instance was “because I can watch without having to think hard” (28 percent) (100 percent = total for all motivations), followed by “because I can laugh” (26 percent). The three top-ranking answers given when respondents had been asked about their attitudes were in this case ranked third, fourth and fifth.

The difference between “attitude” and “actual situation” is probably not due to the fact that respondents told interviewers what they wanted to hear when asked about attitudes. Rather, it is almost certainly because people are not aware that they consider it important to be able to watch TV programs pleasantly and without having to think hard. In fact, their desire to watch TV to relax and unwind is strong.

In the March 2001Media and Life Survey,<sup>6</sup> TV programming was divided into three genres and respondents were asked which type of programming they most wanted to see. Their answers were “enjoyable and relaxing programs” (45 percent), “informative programs about world events and developments” (41 percent) and “programs that impart knowledge and culture” (13 percent). This shows that respondents wanted relaxing, enjoyable programs just as much as programs informing them about what was going on in the world.

suteshon imeji no shoso” [TV Viewing and Station Images], *Hoso kenkyu to chosa*, July 2000 issue. For contrasts between interview study findings and findings of the motivation study, see, Tomomune, Hara, Shigemori, “Nichijo kankaku ni yorisou baraeti bangumi” [Variety Shows That Cater to Popular Tastes], *Hoso kenkyu to chosa*, March 2001.

<sup>6</sup> Kamimura Shuichi and Ida Mieko, “Keitai denwa to intanetto no riyo jokyō: ‘Media to seikatsu’ chosa kara” [Mobile Phone and Internet Use: The “Media and Daily Life” Survey], *Hoso kenkyu to chosa*, August 2001.

Another study, the Survey of Viewers in the Digital Age,<sup>7</sup> conducted in November and December 1998, had respondents choose among 14 types of media to complete the sentence “. . . is the most helpful for doing \_\_\_\_.” In terms of the activities for which TV was the medium of choice, 54 percent of respondents said “for killing time,” 52 percent “for finding out what is going on in the world,” 45 percent “for having something to talk about,” 40 percent “for thinking about political and social issues” and 37 percent “for acquiring knowledge useful in daily life.” These findings indicate that, along with its role as a medium to help people acquire information, over half the respondents thought of television as the medium most useful for killing time.

During his term of employment at NHK, Soka University professor Tamura Minoru was involved in the design of the (above-mentioned) National Time Use Survey, in which he grouped daily activities into those that function to maintain and propagate the physical body, and those that maintain and boost the spirit. Functions related to maintaining and boosting spirits were further subdivided into “the usual function for gathering information, thinking, and forming ideas” and “special activities to refresh or get a change of pace.”<sup>8</sup> Considering that people today expect both these spirit-bolstering functions from TV, they nonetheless show stronger expectations and use television more extensively for its refresher function, despite continuing their expectations of television for its information-gathering function.

In a 1993 article titled “Terebi goraku no gendaiteki imi” [The Contemporary Meaning of Television Entertainment], NHK’s Nishida Fuminori (formerly of the Public Opinion Research Division) characterized television viewing as “habitual, daily and unfocused.” He commented that since the purpose of television viewing seems to have lost its significance, programs are becoming increasingly entertainment-oriented. Television accounts for a major part of enjoyment in daily life in a society where consumption is considered one of the fulfilling ways of spending time.<sup>9</sup>

Hosei University professor Inamasu Tatsuo writes that “in the early days, the television set was considered the centerpiece of the room where the family gathered, but today it has become a very ordinary medium, something that people watch as they eat or lounge around. Because of this, rather than taking

<sup>7</sup> Kamimura Shuichi and Aramaki Hiroshi, “Shin media no riyo to joho e no shishutsu: ‘Dejitaru jidai no shichosha’ chosa kara” [New Media Usage and Spending on Information: The ‘Viewers in the Digital Age’ Survey], *Hoso kenkyu to chosa*, May 1999.

<sup>8</sup> Tamura Minoru, “Seikatsu kodo no bunrui ni tsuite” [Classification of Daily Activities], *Bunken geppo*, July 1974.

<sup>9</sup> Nishida Fuminori, “Terebi goraku no gendaiteki imi” [The Contemporary Meaning of Television Entertainment], *NHK Hoso bunka chosa kenkyu nempo*, No. 38, 1993.

television as the ‘word from on high,’ so to speak, viewers today are in a psychologically superior position, expecting television to entertain them.”<sup>10</sup>

### News Viewers and Easy Viewing

One could hypothesize that people who want to watch easy, enjoyable programs place priority on watching television “without having to think hard” and “because I can laugh,” and that those who expect television to be an information medium would have different priorities. To explore this idea, viewing motivation was compared between viewers and non-viewers of news programs, the leading type of information program, based on current viewing data from the Station Image Survey of March 2000 (Figure 3).

When viewing motivation for all evening programs, including news broadcasts, was examined among viewers who “watched one or more news programs in their entirety”—*News 7*, *News 9*, *News 11* (NHK [Japan Broadcasting Corporation]), *Kyo no dekgoto* (Nippon Television Network Corporation), *News 23* (Tokyo Broadcasting System Inc.), *News Japan* (Fuji Television Network), *News Station* (Asahi Broadcasting Corporation), and *World Business Satellite* (Television Tokyo Channel 12, Inc.)—aired over a week in evening time slots (news viewers) and others who “did not watch even one news program in its entirety” (news non-viewers), motivation for viewing TV among the two groups was virtually identical, as shown in Figure 3 below.

Motivation to watch news programs per se was, first, “because I can learn about what’s going on in the world” and second, “because I can acquire useful information,” indicating that respondents watched news programs in order to obtain information. However, even news viewers watched many other, non-news programs, and total motivation for viewing all programs was often “because I can watch without having to think hard” or “because I can laugh.” Like news non-viewers, news viewers watch TV for relaxation and enjoyment.

### Absence of Value Consciousness

The above-mentioned motivation survey asked respondents about their satisfaction with the programs they reported watching in their entirety. An average of 92 percent—in other words, almost all respondents—reported they were “satisfied” with the programs they watched. This probably means that the instant an individual starts feeling a program is unsatisfactory, he or she will immediately switch channels.

<sup>10</sup> Inamasu Tatsuo, “Baraeti bangumi no mirai: Datsu shinwa kara kyozon no ruru zukuri e” [The Future of Variety Shows: Rule-making for Moving from Myth to Coexistence], *Shin chosa joho*, No. 29, May–June 2001.

**Figure 3. Comparison of Motivation for Watching Entire Programs, Among News Viewers and Non-viewers**

News viewers

Individuals who watched in their entirety one or more news programs per week

623 persons (out of 1,683)

Total for programs watched in their entirety: 4,876 units

1st	Because I can watch without having to think hard	29%
2nd	Because I can laugh	27
3rd	Because I can acquire useful information	20
4th	Because I can learn about what's going on in the world	19
5th	Because I can acquire useful knowledge	18
6th	Because it's wholesome family viewing	17
7th	Because I can see my favorite personalities	16

*Note:* Records only answers accounting for 15% or more.

News non-viewers

Individuals who did not watch even one news program in its entirety per week

1,060 persons (out of 1,683)

Total for programs watched in their entirety: 12,262 units

1st	Because I can watch without having to think hard	27%
2nd	Because I can laugh	26
3rd	Because I can learn about what's going on in the world	20
4th	Because I can acquire useful information	20
5th	Because it's wholesome family viewing	17
6th	Because I can acquire useful knowledge	17

*Note:* Records only answers accounting for 15% or more.

Motivations for viewing programs in their entirety included such passive reasons as "there was nothing else I wanted to watch." Research into whether respondents felt dissatisfaction with such programs showed that an average 74 percent indicated they were satisfied. Although low compared to the overall average of 92 percent, this figure showed that even when watching for passive reasons, most people were satisfied after they finished watching.

Possibly because viewers do not pay for watching commercial terrestrial broadcasts, even though they might not have felt very satisfied, they were neither highly dissatisfied nor felt they had wasted money, as long as they had been able to watch the program easily and enjoyably. If they were carrying on a conversation or doing some task while they watched television, there would be even less reason for dissatisfaction.

Unlike going to a movie, buying a magazine or attending a sports event,



television viewing is not often a disappointing activity that prompts people to feel they have wasted time and money.

### **The Always-on, “Environment Appliance”**

In the March 1997 TV and Information Behavior Survey, 57 percent of respondents said they sometimes “worked, did housework or studied with the TV on,” while 48 percent said they “sometimes left the TV on even if there was nothing in particular they wanted to watch.”<sup>11</sup>

According to findings of the “Japanese and Television” survey conducted every five years since 1985, the ratio of people who believe that television is “essential” is increasing, and this trend becomes more pronounced in inverse proportion to age. The survey also found that a large proportion of people who watch TV for a long time and who frequently channel-hop “feel ill at ease if the TV isn’t on.”<sup>12</sup>

Rather than selecting programs to watch and then turning on the TV, it would appear that people leave their TVs on all the time, choosing the program they feel like watching in a particular situation from among those being broadcast. Because they can switch programs easily and often thanks to the ubiquitous remote control device, the television has become an always-on “environment appliance.”

## TELEVISION AS A “DIVERSION DEVICE”

This section attempts to organize the many different ways attitudes toward television viewing can be described, from directed, purposeful viewing to casual viewing while engaged in other activities.

Figure 4 represents a matrix of viewing behavior—Is the viewer watching television exclusively, or doing something else at the same time?—and viewing approach—Is the viewer watching to obtain information or appreciate content, or watching without any specific aim?

### **Viewing with a Purpose**

First, quadrant I in the figure represents viewers whose action is exclusively watching television and who watch for the sake of information or content; in

<sup>11</sup> Shiraishi Nobuko, “Terebi sedai no genzai II, hitobito no terebi shicho kodo: ‘Terebi to joho kodo’ chosa kara” [The Current State of the Television Generation II, Viewers’ Television Viewing Habits: The “Television and Information Behavior” Study], *Hoso kenkyu to chosa*, October 1997.

<sup>12</sup> Kamimura Shuichi, Ikoma Chiho and Nakano Sachiko, “Nihonjin to terebi 2000: Terebi shicho no genzai” [Japanese and Television: TV Viewing in 2000], *Hoso kenkyu to chosa*, August 2000.

this state, the viewer is mentally and physically concentrated on television. When concentration is very strong, the viewer may wish to avoid answering the telephone or conversing with family members.

Quadrant II represents viewers who want to watch a program but do so while engaged in other activities, alternating between viewing while doing something else and viewing with concentration. Even though the individual may be doing something else while watching, he or she will shift to exclusive viewing upon detecting information deemed necessary. Our research confirmed this viewer attitude, when we queried subjects on how they watched morning talk shows. The TV and Information Behavior Survey (1997) revealed that 50 percent of respondents and the majority of young people, mainly those in their 20s, began concentrating on viewing when something caught their attention, even if, until then, they had been doing something else while watching.<sup>13</sup> This behavior has also been reported in a study conducted by a seminar class taught by Yamada Kazunari of Hosei University's Faculty of Social Sciences. It showed that slightly fewer than 10 percent of college students and housewives said they "always" left the TV on and concentrated only on the portions they wanted to watch, while another 30 percent or so said they "sometimes" did this. "Casual viewing," then, is not a rare phenomenon but is in fact a common relationship with television.<sup>14</sup>

Since people with this viewer attitude are often not watching the screen, television producers have to be inventive to attract their attention. This is why

**Figure 4. Classification of Viewer Attitudes**

	Viewing approach	
	With specific aim regarding contents, information, etc.	With no specific aim regarding contents, information, etc.
Viewing behavior		
TV viewing only	I Viewing with purpose Viewing with concentration	III Diversion viewing (Viewing to spend time enjoyably)
TV viewing + other activity (carried out simultaneously)	II Alternating between viewing while doing something else and viewing with concentration	IV "Background TV"-style viewing Viewing by other family members (TV can be seen and heard) Diversion viewing (Viewing to spend time enjoyably)

<sup>13</sup> Shiraiishi 1997.

<sup>14</sup> [http://www.tbs.co.jp/research/hosei\\_gl.html](http://www.tbs.co.jp/research/hosei_gl.html) (accessed August 29, 2001).

many programs go to great lengths, using sound effects or key word subtitles for example, to catch and hold viewers' attention.

### **Purposeless Viewing Rates**

Quadrant III in the figure represents viewers who are "relaxing" or "killing time," when there is no particular program they want to watch but they are physically concentrating on television. These individuals have high expectations of television, wanting to enjoy time spent watching TV as much as possible. This is "diversion viewing," the topic of this article. It should be noted that judging whether time spent was enjoyable or not is entirely subjective. Some people may find enjoyable active, concentrated viewing for the purpose of intellectual stimulation or learning the latest information, but this category "diversion viewing" refers to "spending this time easily and enjoyably."

Quadrant IV represents situations in which the television could be turned off, because the viewer has no specific viewing purpose in mind and is doing various other things as well. Such an individual may have the television on as "background," because he or she may find it too quiet or lonely without it on. Or, this may describe the housewife who, even though other family members are the main viewers at meal times, is a partial participant in viewing. Purposeless viewing may also be motivated by the faint hope that if the TV is left on, something interesting or engaging may appear.

### **Changing Viewer Attitudes**

Figure 4 includes a classification for "TV viewing + other activity," in other words, viewing while doing something else (*nagara shicho*). Studies concerning viewing behavior often use this description, but it is quite difficult to measure.

For example, how would "viewing while doing something else" be recorded in the following instance? For about a one-hour period after dinner, a housewife moves back and forth between kitchen and dining room, clearing the table, washing and putting away dishes as she listens to the television, chatting for a while when the phone rings, concentrating now and then on what is being shown, making sure the children have done their homework, and so on.

At certain moments during the hour, the housewife's attention has been 80 percent concentrated on the television, but at other times she has only been focused 10 percent, her degree of attention shifting constantly. If she were asked when she had been concentrating on viewing and when she had been watching while doing something else, it would have been very difficult for her to answer. Although this also varies with age and family composition, there

are probably many more people who watch television while doing something else than the figures in various surveys indicate, and it is likely that many people concentrate on viewing once in a while as they watch television while doing something else.

Furthermore, viewer attitudes differ even for the same individual, depending on the circumstances. Take the housewife mentioned above, a good example of constantly changing viewer attitudes. On the evening of September 11, 2001, many people who would ordinarily have been in bed stayed up late, riveted to the television by images of the terrorist attacks, thus temporarily exhibiting viewing with a purpose/with concentration (quadrant I). Major events, tragic accidents or “killer contents” like World Cup soccer matches can induce people to watch television more actively and consciously than usual.

Probably few people who work or go to school in the daytime watch television in the morning before leaving the house without doing something else simultaneously, and most of them probably alternate between viewing while doing something else and concentrated viewing (quadrant II). They may expect the lively sounds of morning television banter to wake them up, and having the time displayed on the screen—more exact than any clock in the household—is probably an important benefit as well. There are thus well-defined viewer attitudes depending on the time of day, and mornings tend to be especially time-centric.

The individuals described in the above examples are most likely unaware of their viewer attitudes and variations thereof. But if they decide they want to concentrate on watching a TV drama, they might retreat to their own room to watch undisturbed.

Viewer attitudes change depending on personal attributes as well as lifestyle, so it is natural for people living in large families and individuals living alone to differ in this. Viewer attitudes shift during the day, and change constantly for the same individual. There may be sudden changes as well, and individuals’ attitudes may alter, whether they are conscious of it or not.

### **What Is Diversion Viewing?**

More detailed discussion is needed of “diversion viewing” in quadrants III and IV of the figure. The diversion viewers represent those who expect television to entertain them so that they can pass time enjoyably. Although these viewers are not entirely devoid of interest in acquiring information or appreciating content, these motivations are not dominant. Further, it is difficult to evaluate whether viewers are in fact watching because they expect to be enter-

tained, but the percentage of such viewers is probably quite substantial, considering the background just described.

The dominant characteristic of diversion viewing is its “mood-making” function: the main viewing motivation is watching TV as an enjoyable pastime, or the fact that having the television on lightens the atmosphere. In other words, diversion viewing can be considered viewing purely for the sake of “enjoyment.” In addition to watching because a program seems interesting, viewers in these quadrants are also motivated by the expectation, before viewing, of how they will probably feel—“how will I feel if I watch this program?” They expect some benefit; for example, they anticipate that watching TV will make them laugh, cry or feel deeply moved.

This expectation of benefit is at work not just in television viewing but in consumption behavior among today’s consumers. Marketing consultant Mori Yukio notes that when consumers buy some product, they now tend to be more interested in what value or benefit will accrue from buying the product than in what kind of product it is. “As I have just explained, consumers are tired of ‘translating’ the product concept and aren’t buying any more,” he says. “So what do consumers tired of ‘pursuing’ the concept do now? They expect companies to translate it for them. They say, ‘OK, now I know what this product is; now tell me what advantages are in it for me.’ This concept of ‘benefit’ is becoming more commonplace. What is this ‘benefit’? It is something or some product that gives the consumer value or advantage.”<sup>15</sup>

A similar trend may be at work among television viewers, who may be placing more importance on the feelings a program causes them to experience than what they will learn from it. For example, the TV program listings in the newspaper described one program on a given day, not in terms of its content, but as one that would “make you feel positively motivated (*maemuki*).” This is probably a typical example of producing a program to cater to diversion viewing, when people watch television to relax and enjoy themselves.

### THE VARIETY-PROGRAMIZING TREND

In this section, we will examine television as a diversion device from the viewpoint of programming. So-called variety programs—programs in which the host, often a comedian or a comedy team, and other TV entertainers mainly talk of various topics in a manner that makes viewers laugh and enjoy themselves—account for a high percentage of all television programming. Evening household viewership rates for the first week of September 2001 (from Video

<sup>15</sup> Mori Yukio, *Shimpuru maketingu* [Simple Marketing], Shoeisha, 2000, p. 45.

Research Kanto) indicated that 23 out of the 50 top-ranking programs were of the variety style,<sup>16</sup> among them *Sanma no super karakuri TV* (TBS), *Dempa shonen* (NTV), *Sekiguchi Hiroshi no Tokyo friend park II* (TBS), and *Downtown DX* (NTV).

Variety programs are popular nowadays because all kinds of programs, be they news, sports, educational, or geared to special interests, have become in a sense “variety” shows.<sup>17</sup> Over 30 years ago, film critic Ogi Masahiro commented: “Variety-style programming is becoming more popular now not just because Japanese have modernized. I presume it has more to do with the nature of broadcasting itself. When I watch the good variety programs being aired lately, I realize that the broadcasting information medium is itself a smorgasbord—it’s like one huge variety program running dozens of hours a day.”<sup>18</sup>

Critic Ogi took a positive view of the fact that television has an inherently variety-style nature, but others often speak in negative tones of television’s leanings toward the “variety” approach. Although it is not the purpose of this article to discuss the pros and cons of this trend, we must at least bear in mind that the diversion viewing attitude of viewers is a background factor.

### **Beyond the Enjoyment Factor**

The viewing motivation aspect also points to the popularity of variety programs. In order to determine which factors contribute to viewing motivation, the authors conducted a factor analysis for programs that respondents in the Station Image Survey said they watched in their entirety. Figure 5 shows that three factors were identified.

#### *Factor 1—the “relaxation” factor*

Motivations such as “because I can watch without having to think hard,” “because I can laugh,” “because it relieves my fatigue” and “because it’s wholesome family viewing” registered high scores, so this factor was called the “relaxation” factor.

#### *Factor 2—the “information” factor*

Motivations like “because I can acquire useful information,” “because I can

<sup>16</sup> Variety shows were defined in accordance with “Nichijo kankaku ni yorisou baraeti bangu-mi” [Variety Shows That Cater to Popular Tastes], March 2001 issue of *Hoso kenkyu to chosa*.

<sup>17</sup> Hagiwara Shigeru ed., *Hen'yo suru media to nyusu hodo* [The Changing Media and News Reporting], Maruzen, 2001, wherein an empirical analysis is made of current conditions regarding news program content and staging.

<sup>18</sup> Ogi Masahiro, “Hoso koso baraeti, baraeti koso hoso to iu koto” [Variety Is Broadcasting, Broadcasting Is Variety], *Hoso bunka*, August 1970 .

acquire useful knowledge” and “because I can hear various views” scored high, so this factor was called the “information” factor.

*Factor 3—the “emotional” factor*

Motivations like “because it stirs the emotions,” “because I can identify with it” and “because it’s thrilling and exciting” had high scores, so this was called the “emotional” factor.

Figure 6 shows the programs (as of March 2000) that scored highest, ranked in descending order, when analyzed for each of the above factors. (An annotated list of these programs is provided in the appendix starting on page 43.)

Most of the programs with high scores for the “relaxation” factor were variety-style programming—*Sanma no super karakuri TV* (TBS), *SMAP x SMAP* (Fuji), and *Warau inu no boken* (Fuji). Of the 20 top-ranked programs, 16 were “variety shows.” One would expect that many of the programs viewers watch because of the “relaxation” factor are variety style, but variety programs are also present in the lists for the two other factors. Information-type variety programming, such as *Ito-ke no shokutaku* (NTV) and *Tameshite gatten* (NHK) are at the top of the list where the “information” factor is concerned. And while dramas and movies lead the rankings for the “emotional” factor, variety programs like *Sekai ururun taizaiki* (TBS) and *Kiseki taiken! Unbelievable* (Fuji) make a respectable showing as well. It is also worth noting that the “emotional” factor list includes “reality-show-style variety pro-

**Figure 5. Results of Factor Analysis Concerning Motivation for Watching Programs in Their Entirety**

(after varimax rotation)

	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3
Because it’s thrilling and exciting	0.282	-0.111	<b>0.699</b>
Because I can laugh	<b>0.877</b>	*	*
Because I can acquire useful information	*	<b>0.943</b>	*
Because I can watch without having to think hard	<b>0.954</b>	*	0.164
Because I can see my favorite personalities	<b>0.557</b>	-0.159	0.496
Because I can hear various views	*	<b>0.745</b>	*
Because I can identify with it	0.128	0.168	<b>0.908</b>
Because I can acquire useful knowledge	*	<b>0.876</b>	*
Because it relieves my fatigue	<b>0.803</b>	*	0.351
Because I can learn about what’s going on in the world	-0.286	<b>0.655</b>	-0.104
Because it stirs the emotions	*	*	<b>0.960</b>
Because it’s wholesome family viewing	<b>0.668</b>	0.368	0.432

Bold: high scores \* : virtually zero

**Figure 6. Top-ranking Programs Among Those with High Scores for Each Factor**

High for "relaxation" factor	High for "information" factor	High for "emotional" factor
1. Sanma no super karakuri TV	1. Ito-ke no shokutaku	1. Nichiyō gekijo: Beautiful Life
2. SMAP x SMAP	2. Tameshite gatten	2. Sannen B-gumi
3. Warau inu no boken	3. News Station	2. Kimpachi sensei
4. Sazae-san	4. Tokumei research 200X	3. Golden yoga gekijo:
5. Odorū! Sanma goten!	5. Broadcaster	Forrest Gump
6. Sekiguchi Hiroshi no Tokyo friend park II	6. Koko ga hen da yo Nihonjin	4. Brand
7. Sata ★ Suma	7. Hakkutsu! Aruaru daijiten	5. Sekai ururun taizaiki
8. Gakko e iko	8. Sekai fushigi hakken	6. Kiseki taiken!
9. Ichiokunin no daishitsumon!? Waratte koraete!	9. Beat Takeshi no TV tackle	Unbelievable
10. Guruguru Ninety-nine	10. Quiz Nihonjin no shitsumon	7. Gachinko
11. Ito-ke no shokutaku	11. Sannen B-gumi Kimpachi sensei	8. Nisennen no koi
12. Comedy o-Edo de gozaru	12. Kaiun! Nandemo kanteidan	9. Shukan storyland
13. Mecha x 2 iketeru!	13. NHK News 7	10. Zone
14. Dempa shonen	14. Takeshi no bambutsu soseiki	11. Unnan no hontoko!
15. Mito Komon	15. Close-up gendai	12. Ainori
16. Chibi Maruko-chan	16. Sekai marumie! Terebi tokusobu	13. Hamidashi keiji jone-tsukei
17. Akashiya mansion monogatari	17. Quiz akappaji aoppaji	14. Aa! Barairo no chinsei
18. Dotchi no ryori show	18. NHK special: seiki o koete	15. Sekai marumie! Terebi tokusobu
19. NHK kayo concert	19. Sekai ururun taizaiki	16. Ai no bimbo dasshutsu daisakusen
20. Utchan Nanchan no urinari!	20. Chikushi Tetsuya News 23	17. Ikimono chikyu kiko
		18. Heisei meotojawan: dokechi no hanamichi
		19. Aoi Tokugawa sandai
		20. Omiai kekkon

Note: Programs as of March 2000. See details on pages 43–50.

gramming" like *Gachinko* (TBS), *Unnan no hontoko!* (TBS) and *Ainori* (Fuji), where selected viewers experience various things within a planned program framework.

This demonstrates that variety programs respond not just to the "relaxation" factor in viewing motivation but can also satisfy needs that include even "information" and "emotional" factors.

### Making Variety-style Programs for Diversion Viewing

In the March 2001 issue of *Hoso kenkyū to chosa* (published by the Japan



Broadcasting Corporation [NHK]), the authors analyzed the content of 137 variety programs and reported that “variety programming today has sought to respond to popular tastes and viewer attitudes.” The present article examines the characteristics of variety-style program production from the perspectives of viewer attitudes and needs.

*a) For diversion viewing, people want to be able to laugh*

In the Station Image Survey on programs watched in their entirety, the viewer motivation “because I can laugh” ranked second only to “because I can watch without having to think hard.” Viewers thus consider humor/laughter an important element in television viewing. According to the Survey on Youth and the Media in the Digital Information Society (2001), the highest proportion of respondents aged 16–29 (94 percent) said they watched television “because I can laugh and enjoy myself.”<sup>19</sup> This shows that young people have high expectations that TV will make them laugh.

Specifically, people want to laugh because they want to feel cheerful and happy; they want to feel relief and contentment, and a sense of spiritual healing; they want to see their families laughing; and they want to avoid anything that leaves an unpleasant aftertaste.

An analysis of variety program content showed that 103 out of 137 programs were designed for viewers to laugh and enjoy themselves. This is accomplished by using performers skilled at stand-up comedy. Many young Japanese aspire to become comedians, and the comedians who appear on TV, who have had to compete with numerous rivals, are the cream of the crop. Just the fact that they appear in a program hints that viewers can be guaranteed a laugh. But the laughs don’t come only from skits. By employing discreet humor these entertainers can turn even a sad or gloomy topic into something that evokes a rueful smile—a mixture of laughter and sadness. Even special-interest programs have the potential for humor in the hands of these artists.

*b) For diversion viewing, people don’t want to tax their brains*

As mentioned earlier, the most common motivation for watching television was “because I can watch without having to think hard.” This probably represents the following feelings on the part of viewers: I want to watch without thinking about anything in particular; I don’t want to have to think hard as I

<sup>19</sup> Shiraishi Nobuko, Kato Akira, Saito Yoshihiko, “Terebi wa kakasenai, intanetto, keitaiden-wa de mo tasai na johō kōdo: ‘Dejitaru johō shakai ni okeru seishōnen to media’ chōsa kara” [Television Is Essential: Even with Diversified Information-gathering via the Internet and Mobile Phones: Survey on Youth and the Media in the Digital Information Society], *Hosō kenkyū to chōsa*, July 2001.

watch; I don't want to encounter "difficult" topics; I want to know the outcome first, because I don't like a roundabout approach; and, no matter when I tune in, I want to be able to know what's going on. Variety programs produced to meet these needs use various techniques to help viewers understand the content.

If the subject is a difficult one, the program may present examples of how the topic relates to daily life. If an expert is talking, captions providing biographical information or notes on the individual's views may appear on the screen. But here again, performers play an important role, because their job is to ask elementary questions about the subject. This reassures viewers and helps them understand the topic.

Many variety-style programs include a substantial studio portion. For example, the camera may return to the studio between video clips for confirmation, or include segments where performers relate similar experiences they have had, to underline the relevance of the subject matter and make it easy to understand.

The copious use of subtitles or captions is another way in which these programs are helpful. Subtitles allow viewers to "see" the words being spoken even if they are chatting about other matters with someone, such as another member of the family. Cartoon-style "bubbles" are also frequently used, and the TV screen is sometimes alive with illustrative and orthographic features.

Variety programs are made so viewers don't have to think hard; in fact they don't even have to feel. These programs even offer a kind of "navigation system" for the emotions, using canned laughter or voice-overs expressing astonishment, or letters saying "ooh" or "aah" that undulate across the screen, cueing viewers when to laugh or be surprised.

*c) For diversion viewing, people want to avoid the unsettling or unnatural*

Through interviews, the authors confirmed with viewers that programs that made them feel uncomfortable, that were of dubious quality, or included staged dialogue and action were considered "unsettling" or "unnatural."

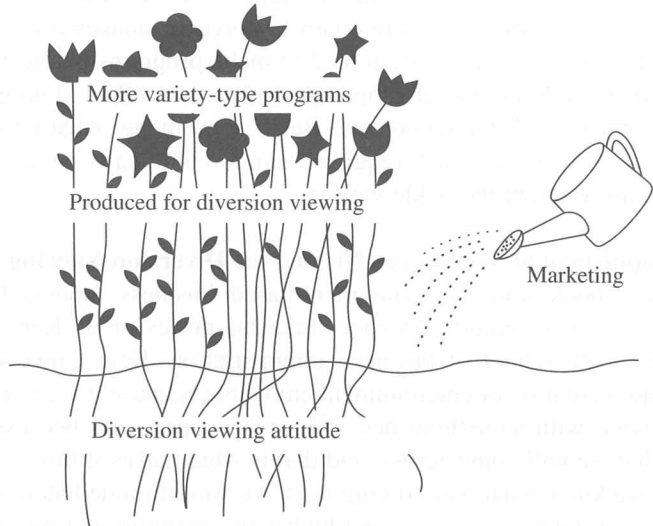
Naturalness is essential in variety programs and the tone is basically that of ordinary conversation, because otherwise viewers would feel that the programs are out of sync with their daily lives. Any unnatural pause in the flow of talk makes viewers uncomfortable, so performers must be able to "keep the ball in the air," so to speak. If others on the show feel that a performer has made a smug remark or is not being honest, they will immediately comment on it. If one person tries to gloss over some matter with a platitude, someone else will pipe up "but honestly, you didn't really like that, did you?" The role of *tsukkomi*—a person who intervenes promptly to restore order when another has made a silly remark or action—originating in two-man comedy is now a staple ingredient of variety shows.

*d) For diversion viewing, people want to enjoy method rather than content*

Viewers are more interested in presentation than theme, and they want to enjoy the process rather than the result. Many variety programs place more emphasis on how, and how entertainingly, something is shown, rather than on the content to be conveyed. The contents of programs may vary, but the performers are the ones who make a program enjoyable to watch. This method, which makes it possible to scrap and build programs frequently, is convenient for producers. If they can book talented, popular performers, they can ground their programs' style to a certain degree in the individuality of those performers. It is possible to create some special segments in their programs and modify them into more attractive ones as viewer reactions are gauged.

Some features revolve around a theme, but even these programs more often show the process than the result or goal of the feature in the hope that something unexpected or surprising will happen. We can compare viewers of such programs to spectators of live sports broadcasts. Since process is all-important, the program is structured so that every moment counts and to make the next thing to come up look interesting to viewers. Variety programs featuring some kind of challenge—for example, a dance contest, a language proficiency test, an a cappella competition—have been popular for a long time. Showing the process involved is the secret of their success.

**Figure 7. Diversion viewing  $\Rightarrow$  more variety-type programs**



The above elements form a base on which producers come up with programs that make television viewing enjoyable. Although some people complain that TV programs rely too heavily on performers nowadays, it may be that performers' words and actions themselves are one of the main themes of these shows.

Broadcasters, especially the private networks, make every effort to entice viewers to watch television as long as possible, and to stay tuned to their station. Here, program marketing, which measures viewers' needs and desires, comes into play. From a different perspective, marketing is responsible for keeping viewers glued to their televisions for hours. Figure 7 uses the flower metaphor to describe the process whereby marketing probes the largely subliminal elements of viewing as a means of diversion and puts them into concrete form on the television screen.

### WHERE IS TELEVISION HEADED?

For producers, creating diversion viewing programs that do not require much mental effort is quite difficult. When the material is aimed at viewers who concentrate on what they are watching, making programs resembles film-making. Such viewers want solid content and a highly-perfected product, and while this requires a lot of hard work, it is satisfying to the producer. Creating programs that viewers can watch enjoyably, on the other hand, requires application of various techniques, because even though the television set is always on, viewers choose just one program out of all those being broadcast. The convenience of the remote control, moreover, makes it easy to switch channels. Thus, producers are forced to make programs predicated on this viewer proclivity. Even though emphasis is placed on effect, a program does have to have some substantial content. Besides, no matter what producers do, people are easily bored, which requires them to continually come up with fresh programs to tempt the fickle viewer.

### **Sophisticated Techniques Needed for Diversion Viewing**

In a book about entertainment-based business models leading the early twenty-first century, Yamane Takashi, professor at Keio Business School (graduate school of business administration, Keio University), writes: "We find recreation or entertainment enjoyable because it is an encounter with creativity, with something new. We enjoy it precisely because we never know what we will come across, and that is what makes it fun . . . put another way, if we knew what was coming next, we would immediately start to feel that it wasn't entertaining. . . . The higher the premium placed on novelty and the

more the stress on innovation, the faster a product becomes boring. In the entertainment business, boredom is inevitable. Or rather, this business contains a mechanism that inherently promotes boredom. The essence of this business is not just to continue seeking out new forms of recreation and pitching new products to consumers, but to continue negating existing products at the same time.”<sup>20</sup>

Contemporary program development, particularly that for programs aimed at diversion viewing, resembles the development of the entertainment-style productions described above. People who watch television mainly for sheer enjoyment and relaxation have to be entertained in a never-boring way that is as lightweight as possible.

Kijima Seiichiro, TBS executive producer, has written as follows: “Television is like taking a class in a university auditorium. A professor who can fill an auditorium with 500 students will keep his lecture simple and will save more specialized material for his seminar classes. . . . what’s good about a lecture for 500 students is the same as what makes a television program good. No matter how useful the topic, the students won’t be interested unless the professor uses a technique suitable for an auditorium and can keep the students awake. Professors who can’t fill auditoriums always complain that ‘student quality has declined,’ even though the truth of the matter is that students don’t show up because their lectures are boring. A producer who can’t get good ratings is the same.”<sup>21</sup> Even though the message may be clear, trying to communicate it to large numbers of people is not that easy—that is what producing television shows is like nowadays.

### **Responding to Needs Other Than Diversion Viewing**

Television for the sake of diversion viewing accounts for a considerable proportion of viewing, and this article has described how programs responding to this need enjoy great popularity.

But providing only this type of program could turn all programs into expendable ephemera. Once the marketing logic that priority must be given to the majority spreads, viewers are given only what they want and anything they don’t want is avoided. In this situation, the needs of minorities and latent needs that are not being addressed because viewers are unaware of them will tend to continue being ignored.

<sup>20</sup> Yamane Takashi, *Entateinmento hasso no keieigaku* [Business Administration from an Entertainment Perspective], Diamond Sha, 2001, pp. 185-86.

<sup>21</sup> Kijima Seiichiro, “Watashi ni totte no shichosha: Reberu no hikui tsukurite hodo shichosha no sei ni suru” [What Viewers Mean To Me: The Less Talented Producers Are, The More They Blame Viewers], *Galac*, May 2001.

Mejiro University associate professor Kawabata Miki, who analyzed the trend toward entertainment-style news, commented as follows when she participated in a round-table discussion organized by a magazine: "People don't need to be serious all the time. They usually have some part of their personality that can become silly. Even programs that seem a waste of time are, to those who watch them, not just a passive experience where they can watch without thinking but also something they watch knowing that it is silly, for relaxation. . . . Enjoying yourself by being a bit silly is perfectly all right. But viewers are also sometimes looking for information, and such information should be transmitted."<sup>22</sup>

Kotaki Tetsuya, a professor at Nihon University College of Art, has written about the overwhelming popularity of variety shows: "Another TV role in a multichannel environment should be to fulfill non-variety needs despite the trend toward entertainment-style television. . . . Because television functions to transmit information, its 'relay' and 'variety' characteristics are bound to become even more pronounced. That is fine, but will the creative act, in the subjective sense, continue to be allowed? . . . Unless twenty-first century television guarantees the creative act, it will lose its richness of communication in expression and appreciation. When that happens, television will no longer be television but merely a telecommunication tool."<sup>23</sup>

Of course, people do not just expect television to be an enjoyable pastime. They also want programs that are well-made, that have a message, or that have depth and have high information content, so producers must respond to these needs as well. But producers need to have a good idea of when and how viewers want to fulfill those needs. Furthermore, they should understand that ideas about what constitutes a good program or a meaningful message change with time and do not remain static.

### Television in the Digital, Multi-channel Age

Television may not be the only means people have of spending time enjoyably. Broadband and lower user charges are making the Internet and other software for enjoyable viewing more easily accessible. The spread of television with a built-in home server may also change the meaning of how people spend their time. People may come to value their time more highly, and viewing simply for the sake of killing time could decrease.

Today, with the media in flux, it is increasingly important to learn more

<sup>22</sup> "Zadankai: Bangumi no yomikata, terebi no mirarekata" [Round-table discussion: How Programs Are Perceived, How Television Is Viewed], *Galac*, May 2001.

<sup>23</sup> Kotaki Tetsuya, "Baraeti bunka no gyokan wa umerareru ka" [Can Non-variety Needs Be Fulfilled in the Variety Culture?], *Gekkan minpo*, January 2001.

about what the public actually expects from existing media in terms of functions and needs.

### **The Importance of TV as a “Diversion Device”**

Not just television viewing but many other aspects of life today—consumption or lifestyles, for example—are heavily oriented to enjoyment of “the now.” Considering that from its birth, television worked as an entertainment and recreation medium allowing viewers a means of diversion, one could say that this function has become greatly magnified today and that in response to viewers’ needs, all programs are increasingly variety-oriented.

Although diversion viewing may sound lightweight, in fact it is not. Through this tactic television has been able to grow and develop without losing its competitiveness vis-à-vis other media. By meeting viewers’ needs for information and entertainment simultaneously television remains essential. This is ample evidence that television for diversion viewing has become firmly embedded in the fabric of daily life.

\*                    \*                    \*

### Appendix to Figure 6 Top-ranking Program Summaries

#### *Sanma no super karakuri TV* [Sanma’s Super Gimmick TV]

Hosted by the popular comedian Akashiya Sanma. Segments include “Video Letter,” in which parents living in the countryside record a video message to a son or daughter living away from home, “Karakuri Nihongo,” in which non-native speakers try to recount an anecdote in Japanese, and a street quiz aimed at people who are heavily drunk, who may answer after consulting someone by telephone.

#### *SMAP x SMAP* [SMAP by SMAP]

Comedy and entertainment program on which members of the popular music group SMAP cook dishes at the request of a guest, perform skits, play games, and sing and dance.

#### *Warau inu no boken* [The Laughing Dog’s Adventure]

Consists of short skits performed mainly by the jokester duo Utchan and Nanchan (Uchimura Teruyoshi and Nanbara Kiyotaka) and members of the three-guy comedy group “Neptune.”

*Sazae-san*

Home-drama animation series based on a comic strip that appeared in the newspaper *Asahi shimbun* for 25 years. Daily events in an average, suburban Japanese family are depicted with warmth and humor.

*Odoru! Sanma goten!* [Dance! Sanma's Palace!]

A roomful of TV personalities display their verbal talents by recounting episodes and engaging in repartee on topics assigned by popular comedian Akashiya Sanma.

*Sekiguchi Hiroshi no Tokyo friend park II* [Tokyo Friend Park 2 with Sekiguchi Hiroshi]

Hosted by the actor and talk-show host Sekiguchi Hiroshi. A pair of celebrities take on tough games requiring some physical performance, such as leaping up on a wall using adhesive gloves, and answer quiz questions.

*Sata ★ Suma* [Saturday SMAP]

Aired on Saturday and hosted by two of the five members of the popular male music group SMAP, "Sata Suma" is short for "Saturday Sumappu." They take up various challenges, such as paying an unannounced visit on a housewife to make breakfast for her family, one of them dolled up in a pink dress.

*Gakko e iko* [Here We Are At School]

Hosted by the singing group V6 and the popular talk show host Mino Monta, the show is made up of segments featuring junior and senior high school students. In the "Miseinen no shucho" [Minors Speak Their Minds] segment, junior or senior high school students entertain their schoolmates by shouting out from the rooftop of their school something funny or serious.

*Ichiokunin no daishitsumon!?! Waratte koraete!* [100 Million People's Big Questions!?! Irrepressible Laughter]

Hosted by the TV celebrity Tokoro Joji. A variety show featuring different parts of the country. Every week Tokoro throws a dart at a map of the Japanese archipelago and staff members visit the place the dart happens to hit.

*Guruguru Ninety-nine* [Spinning Ninety-nine]

Hosted by the comedy duo Ninety-nine. The most popular segment is "Gochi ni narimasu" [Thanks for Treating], in which the members of the program go to a restaurant, ordering dishes from an unpriced menu and guessing the price. The person whose bill is the furthest from the actual total for his or her meal has to pay for everyone's meal.

*Ito-ke no shokutaku* [The Ito Family Dinner Table]

Invites viewers to share the "ingenious tricks" they have devised for dealing with household tasks (such as the knack for breaking eggs with one hand, etc.). Contri-



butions to the program are sent in by letter or recorded on home video. Gathered in a studio setting, the fictional "Ito" family, made up of comedian Ito Shiro (the "father") and TV personalities of different generations, listen to the presentations and test their viability.

*Comedy o-Edo de gozaru* [Comedy: Introducing Edo]

Features a comedy drama of the townsmen's life in the Edo period (1603–1867) performed on stage. Toward the end of the program is a segment in which Sugiura Hinako, a manga artist conversant in Edo manners and customs, provides background to the story and talks with the performers.

*Mecha x 2 iketeru!* [Very, Very Groovy!]

Made up of several segments of hilarious skits by the young popular comedy teams Ninety-nine, Gokuraku-tombo, and Yoiko.

*Dempa shonen* [Airwave Kids]

A program that assigns ordinary people and nameless entertainers various demanding tasks and shows how they struggle to live up to the challenge. An aspiring comedian studies under a tutor and takes the entrance examination to the University of Tokyo, a yet-unknown performer travels around the world, hitchhiking and doing part-time jobs to earn his way, etc.

*Mito Komon* [Lord Mito]

A serial historical drama, set in the Edo period. The main character is based on Mito Mitsukuni (1628–1700), grandson of Tokugawa Ieyasu, founder of the Tokugawa shogunate (1603–1867). The now-retired feudal lord enjoys traveling anonymously around the country, accompanied by two bodyguards, challenging and overcoming evil wherever they go. The changeless climax comes when revealing the identity of the old man gets them out of a pinch and defeats the bad guys.

*Chibi Maruko-chan* [Little Maruko]

Television animation of the well-known comic series set in 1970s Japan. Each installment features some situation in the home and school life of elementary school student Maruko-chan.

*Akashiya mansion monogatari* [Tale of the Akashiya Mansion]

A comedy variety show consisting of skits performed by the popular comedian Akashiya Sanma and other TV entertainers.

*Dotchi no ryori show* [Which Dish Is Better?]

A cooking variety show. For each installment, two different dishes are cooked by top-class cooks, using select ingredients. TV celebrities vote on which dish they think will be attractive to most of them. Those on the losing side have to forgo their dish and can only watch the others eat.

*NHK kayo concert* [NHK's Singing Show]

A singing program featuring oldies-and-goldies popular songs broadcast live, mainly from the NHK concert hall in Tokyo.

*Utchan Nanchan no urinari!* [Utchan & Nanchan's Comedy Show]

The popular jokester duo Utchan and Nanchan and other comedians take up various challenges, such as long-distance swimming, rock climbing, or ballroom dancing.

*Tameshite gatten* [Try and You'll See]

Features information useful for living better lives—"eating habits that reduce cholesterol," "pillows for sound sleep," "tricks for outdoor cooking," etc.—are introduced in Q&A form, combined with scientifically controlled tests and experiments to demonstrate their usefulness.

*News Station*

News program aired nightly on weekdays. Kume Hiroshi, former announcer for a commercial broadcasting company, is a star newscaster featured on this long-running program. *News Station* is said to have invented a distinctive style that offers news reports as seen through the eyes of ordinary people.

*Tokumei research 200X* [Special Research 200X]

Provides information on the sciences, current events, disasters, etc., in the form of a dramatized story in which researchers of the fictitious Far East Research Company investigate the background and origin of various knotty questions and report their findings.

*Broadcaster*

Weekend evening news program. Regular host and hostess announcers, a non-Japanese commentator, and semi-regular commentators in the studio offer their impressions and views during the breaks between news reports on controversial issues and incidents that occurred over the week. The program also includes entertaining segments about celebrities in the news, horse race tips, and so on.

*Koko ga hen da yo Nihonjin* [This Is What's Wrong with Japanese]

Guests are Japanese-speaking residents of Japan from various countries of the world. Seated in the studio, they engage in heated arguments on a certain topic (which differs with each installment) concerning Japanese manners and customs and issues of current concern. Popular comedian and film director Beat Takeshi and other celebrities (Terry Itoh, Murakami Rikako, etc.) defend the Japanese perspective.

*Hakkutsu! Aru-aruru daijiten* [Encyclopedia of Plentiful Discoveries]

Hosted by the well-known entertainers Sakai Masaaki, Hiromi, and a woman announcer, this program provides information concerning health, food and eating, and

other aspects of daily life, together with reports of scientific experiments. Several celebrities interested in a topic (which differs with each installment) appear as guests. The studio audience, who take part as "Aru-aru" members, also appear on the studio stage.

*Sekai fushigi hakken* [Discovering Mysteries of the World]

A mini-documentary about world history and the environment is shown and questions are asked. The host is Kusano Hitoshi and a panel of regular celebrities, including Kuroyanagi Tetsuko, compete to answer the questions. The way they answer encourages viewers to learn new things about the topic at hand.

*Beat Takeshi no TV tackle* [Beat Takeshi's TV Tackle]

Popular comedian and film director Beat Takeshi, the program's host, and other celebrities talk in the studio about current issues of concern in Japanese society.

*Quiz Nihonjin no shitsumon* [Quiz: Questions Japanese Ask]

TV announcer Furutachi Ichiro, the host, presents questions, based on questions submitted by viewers from all over Japan, to four celebrity regulars who give different answers citing plausible reasons. Four pairs of guest celebrities compete to guess which of the "answers" is the correct one.

*Sannen B-gumi Kimpachi sensei* [Kimpachi-sensei's Third Year Class B]

Drama series set in a junior high school, in which a dedicated teacher, Mr. Kimpachi (played by popular folk singer and actor Takeda Tetsuya), squarely faces various problems that come up among his students and involve their circumstances.

*Kaiun! Nandemo kanteidan* [Good Luck! Let's Price Your Antique Treasure]

Viewers bring in their antique treasures and a team of art dealers and other experts judge and put a price tag on them. Some of the treasures turn out not to be genuine, but others turn out to be very valuable and worth unexpectedly high prices.

*NHK News 7*

Starting at 7:00 p.m., this is a regular program presenting the news of the day in a straightforward, informative style.

*Takeshi no bambutsu soseiki* [Beat Takeshi's Century of Creation]

An information-oriented variety show, taking up topics in the sciences hosted by comedian Beat Takeshi.

*Close-up gendai* [Close-up Today]

With anchorwoman Kuniya Hiroko, each installment focuses on a controversial issue of the moment. Ways of understanding the problem are presented on the basis of research, and possible solutions are pursued.

*Sekai marumie! Terebi tokusobu* [The World in Full View: Television Investigative Bureau]

Interesting and shocking scenes excerpted from television programs from around the world are introduced with witty narration.

*Quiz akappaji aoppaji* [Quiz: Shame and Embarrassment]

Questions are posted about various things that are considered common knowledge among Japanese. In place of the simple Q&A format, however, this program adopts a complex format in which pre-recordings are shown of those questions being asked of ordinary people. A panel of celebrities in the studio compete to guess who among these respondents will know the correct answer.

*NHK special: Seiki o koete* [NHK Special: Straddling the Centuries]

A serial documentary program, reporting and commenting on major issues the world faces in the transition between the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

*Sekai ururun taizaiki* [Homestays Around the World]

A young television entertainer stays with a family somewhere in the world for about a week, and learns local customs and ways of doing things. Sequences showing his or her experiences are interspersed with short quizzes, which a panel of regular celebrities in the studio attempt to answer, competing for the highest score. Each installment ends with the moving scene of the young person having to leave the host family he or she has gotten to know quite well after the week-long stay.

*Chikushi Tetsuya News 23*

A nightly news program with anchorman Chikushi Tetsuya, well-known journalist and former Asahi newspaper reporter.

*Nichiyo gekijo: Beautiful Life* [Sunday Theater: Beautiful Life]

A romantic drama. A young male beautician falls in love with a woman confined to a wheelchair. The role of the man is played by the popular heartthrob Kimura Takuya.

*Golden yoga gekijo: Forrest Gump* [Golden Western Cinema Theater: Forrest Gump]

The original Hollywood movie. Broadcasts a different popular Western film each week.

*Brand*

A serial drama starring the popular actress Imai Miki and the Kabuki actor Ichikawa Somegoro. Depicts the love story of a career woman in charge of PR for a famous brand of goods and a younger man, who is the eldest son and heir of a long-established school of tea ceremony.

*Kiseki taiken! Unbelievable* [Miraculous Experiences: The Unbelievable]

Program that gathers together curious experiences, mysterious incidents, and other episodes from around the world and broadcasts them in the form of reenacted dramas.

*Gachinko* [Tackle]

Consists of several original segments in which people (who apply to appear on the show) strive to achieve a difficult goal. Their attempt is recorded on camera for the audience to view. For example, young men with a juvenile delinquency record undergo training in a boxing gym, hoping to become a pro boxer, or attempt to study and take the entrance exam to a certain university.

*Nisennen no koi* [A 2000 Year Love]

A serial drama starring the popular actress and actor Nakayama Miho and Kaneshiro Takeshi. A spy from another country, played by Kaneshiro, falls in love with a computer engineer, played by Nakayama.

*Shukan storyland* [Weekly Story Land]

Works of fiction submitted by viewers are made into an animated TV film. Most of these stories are heart-warming, ending with some kind of surprising reversal.

*Zone*

Documentary portraying athletes in the world of sports – their glories and struggles. In the role of “navigation actor,” Higashiyama Noriyuki leads the program.

*Unnan no hontoko!* [Unnan’s Real Game]

Documentary that follows the love stories of selected viewers. Hosted by the standup-comedy duo Utchan and Nanchan.

*Ainori* [All in the Same Bus]

A group of unattached young men and women are passengers on a bus traveling around the world. They search for a partner among the other passengers and declare their feelings for each other. If rejected, they get off the bus to return to Japan and a new passenger gets on. If accepted, the new couple returns to Japan together.

*Hamidashi keiji jonetsukei* [Detective: The Maverick, Passionate Type]

A crime drama in which a detective, who tends to follow unorthodox ways of getting things done but cares deeply about people and his job, along with a team of police investigators led by a police chief who is his ex-wife, pursue criminals and solve cases.

*Aa! Barairo no chinsei* [Ah! Life Is a Bed of Curious Roses]

Selected viewers who are invited to the studio talk about their unusual, eventful lives, and TV celebrities comment. Hosted by comedian Shimada Shinsuke. One regular

feature is a moving scene of reunion between two people who have not seen each other for a long time.

*Ai no bimbo dasshutsu daisakusen* [Passionate Strategies for Escape from Poverty]

This program, hosted by the popular talk show host Mino Monta, offers support to the proprietor of a shop whose business is in decline, showing him undergoing re-training at a successful establishment in an attempt to make a new start. The climax of the program is how the struggling proprietor endures the hardships of starting over.

*Ikimono chikyu kiko* [Travelogue of Life on Earth]

Documentary that introduces the ecology of various forms of life throughout the world.

*Heisei meotojawan: Dokechi no hanamichi* [Conjugal Bliss in the Heisei Era: Royal Road for the Super Stingy]

A serial drama depicting a debt-ridden couple with many children, who run a ramen noodle shop. Starring the popular actress and actor Asano Atsuko and Higashiyama Noriyuki, the drama attracts special attention for its inclusion of many ingenious ways to practice frugality.

*Aoi Tokugawa sandai* [Three Tokugawa Shoguns]

One of the historical drama sagas ("Taiga Drama" series), each broadcast by NHK every Sunday for one whole year. This drama, aired in 2000, depicts the lives of the first three shoguns of the Tokugawa period (1603–1867).

*Omiiai kekkon* [Arranged Marriage]

A serial romantic drama starring the popular actress Matsu Takako and comic actor Yusuke Santamaria.