



The 2026 media landscape

The impact of industry shifts on consumer viewership trends, streaming, cable's big comeback and more.





As the media landscape evolves, so do consumers' viewing preferences—is your marketing strategy keeping up?

The past year has been a busy one for media, to say the least. After a lot of false starts, Paramount is set to acquire Warner Bros., a move that'll combine Paramount with CBS, CNN, HBO and Warner's film library.

Hulu was acquired by Disney, merging Hulu's general entertainment offering with Disney+'s library of family content. Sling launched day, week and weekend passes for live TV, giving consumers more flexibility (especially sports fans). We also saw multiple changes in tier pricing and structure for services like Amazon Prime and Netflix.

So how did these major industry shifts impact consumer preferences? This research shows what's changed in the past year and how you can adapt your strategy to better reach consumers across platforms.

What's in this report?

- The impact of advertising while watching and factors that influence purchase behavior
- Consumers' preferred channels and platforms, including their perception of cable/satellite TV
- What drives subscription choices and how much consumers are spending on cable/satellite TV and streaming
- The state of double-screening today, including top social channels used and top activities people do while double-screening

Let's begin. 



Key media moments and industry shifts from June 2025-June 2026

Consumers continue to enjoy flexibility across streaming platforms, but we're also seeing an increase in service consolidation and a decrease in ad-free options.



June 2025

[Disney finalizes acquisition of Hulu](#), increasing its breadth of content.



August 2025

[Sling launches mini bundles](#), allowing for day, week and weekend passes.



January 2026

23.5 million to 26.5 million viewers tuned into the [Winter Olympics](#) per day.



February 2026

124.9 viewers tuned into the [Super Bowl](#), the second most-watched TV show in U.S. history.



March 2026

Netflix [increases subscription rates](#) (the second time in a year).



April 2026

Amazon launches [Prime Video Ultra](#), its new ad-free tier, and increases price by \$2 a month.



May 2026

[Paramount acquires Warner Bros.](#), including CBS, CNN, HBO and Warner's film library.



TV viewership trends in 2026

The changing media landscape has led to a shift in how consumers across generations tune in.

- 90% of consumers pay attention to ads while watching, and 22% say they look up the product's/service's website after seeing an ad. Actually making a purchase is less common, but **a TV ad is still a clear way to boost brand awareness.**
- Cable/satellite TV continues to skew older in 2026, but **younger generations are more open to getting the legacy service**, especially if they haven't subscribed in the past. Cable/satellite TV is the preferred way to watch news, sports and TV shows, especially for older generations.
- **Amazon Prime Video continues its reign as the most-used service overall**, followed by Netflix, cable/satellite TV, Peacock and Disney+. Paramount+ is one to watch as its content library expands.
- **Nearly all consumers double-screen at least sometimes** and are usually scrolling social media, texting or shopping (and they're almost always using their phones).

Quick stats

1 in 3 use both cable and streaming services

\$120 spent per month on cable/satellite TV

\$42 spent per month on streaming services

1 in 5 look up a brand after watching an ad

50% use social media or text while watching TV

4 in 10 double-screen often or always

Why this matters for marketers

As the industry shifts, consumer behavior follows. Understanding how consumers watch TV today helps you optimize your ad spend and adapt your messaging to reach your target audience across platforms.



Key findings



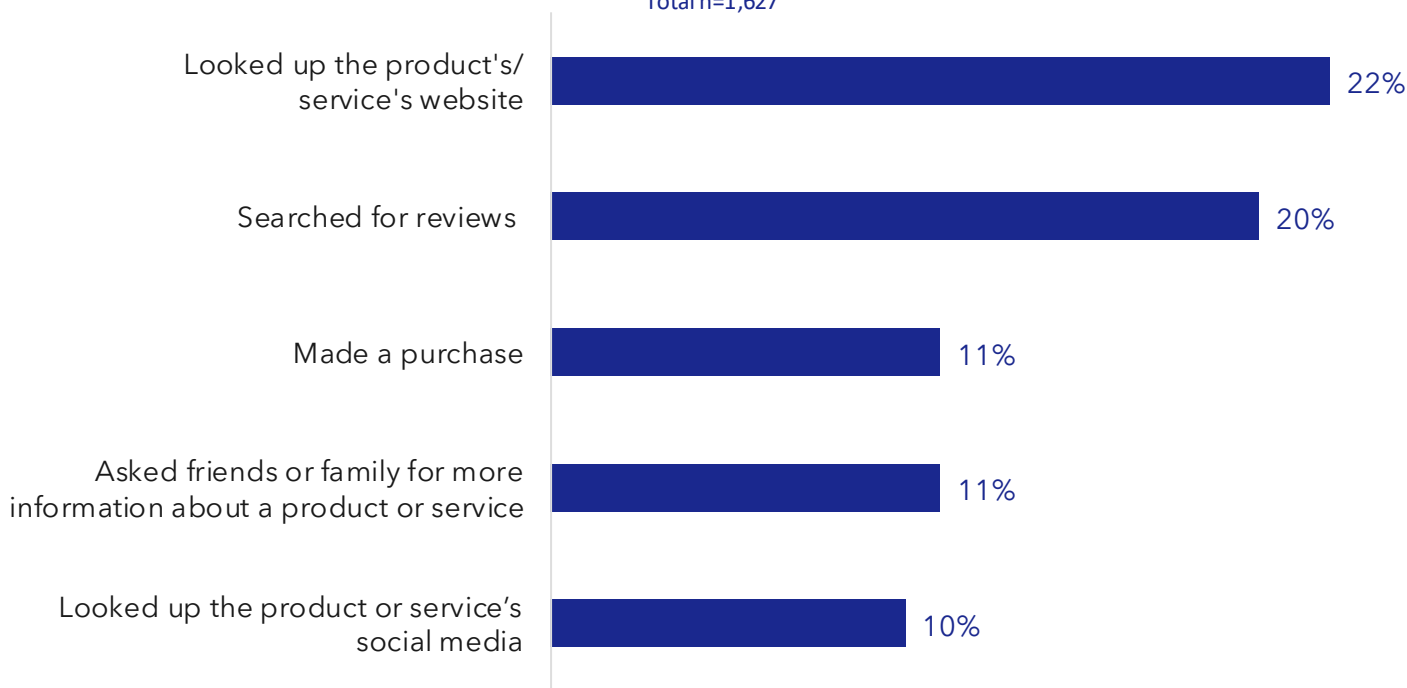
Nearly all consumers watch ads, and 22% end up researching the product or service featured.

While a smaller percentage of viewers actually made purchases after they saw an ad, 20% looked up reviews to learn more. Half of those who made a purchase said the product was something they liked, and nearly 40% said the product was something they needed.

All in all, it's clear that advertisements are still driving brand and product discovery and that consumers still find value in the format. Younger viewers are more likely to find ads engaging or fun, while older viewers are more likely to be indifferent to ads. To get the most out of the channel, brands should create ads that focus on product education and how their products help consumers.

Top 5 actions taken after watching an ad

Total n=1,627



9%

Use AI tools to learn more about a product or service after watching an ad

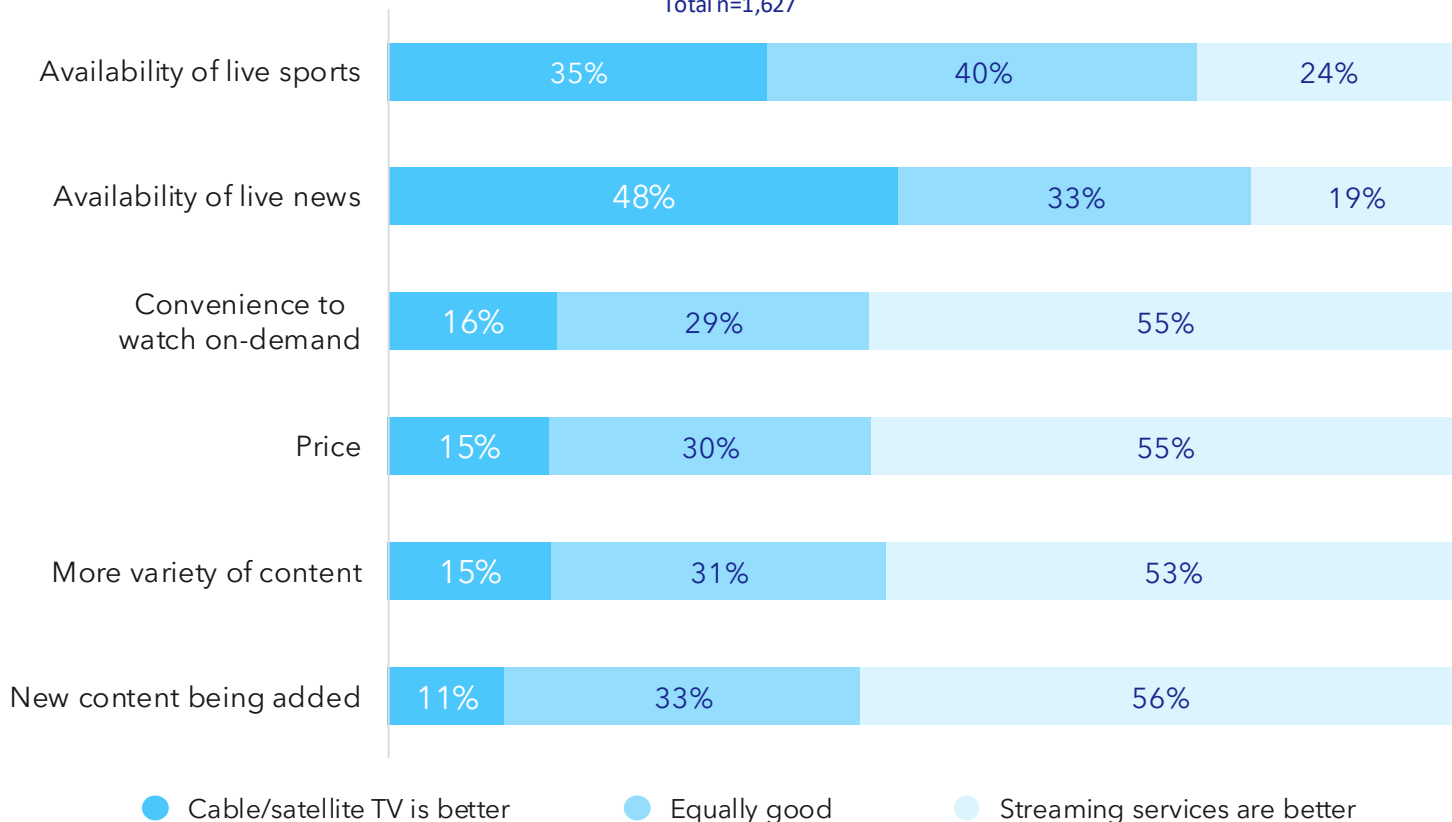
KEY FINDINGS

It's not just about cable vs. streaming: Content type determines where you watch.

Everyone always wants to know whether cable or streaming is better, but consumers are torn—it really depends on what they're watching, and a large percentage feel like cable and streaming offerings are equally good. When we ask about content quality specifically, streaming services get ranked slightly higher than cable (66% vs. 57%).

Which is better: cable/satellite TV or streaming services?

Total n=1,627



10 minutes

How long it takes the average viewer to find something to watch



KEY FINDINGS

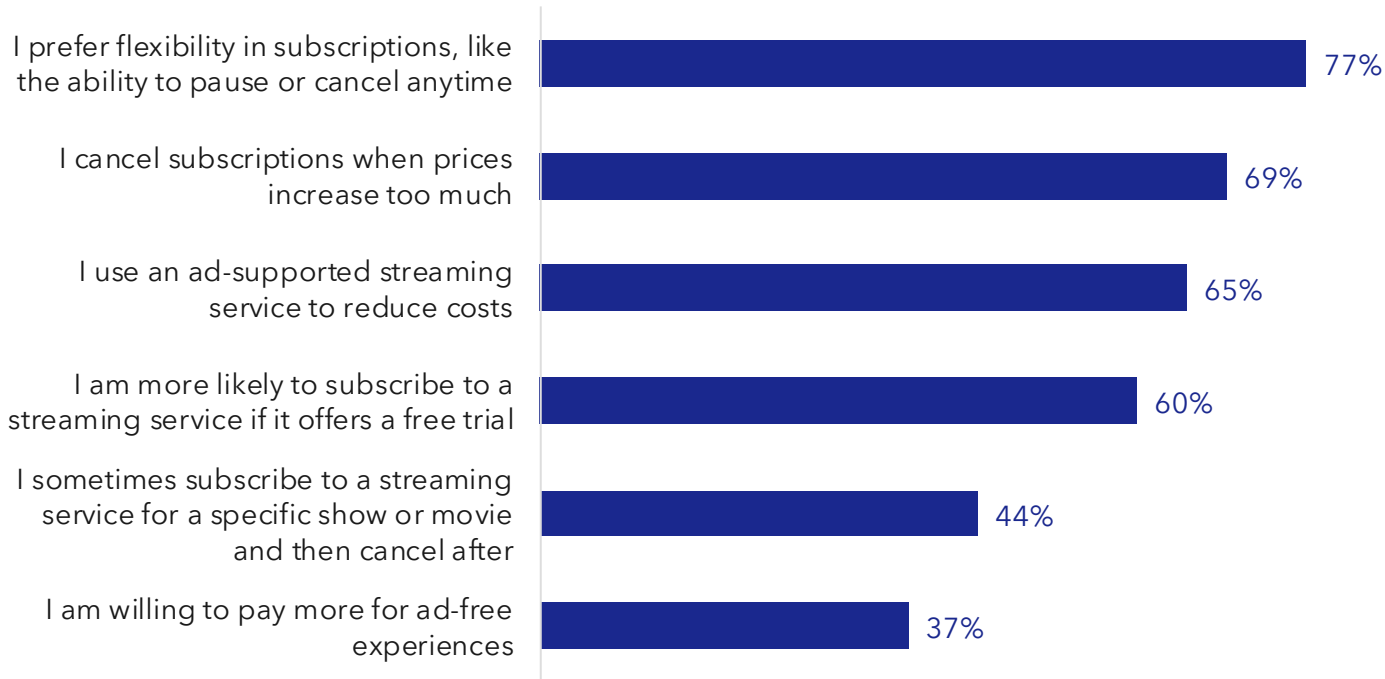
Price is the most important factor in subscription choice, but content variety and convenience still move the needle.

While breadth and depth of content is important, people are most likely to cancel a streaming subscription when the price increases. They also like to be able to cancel or pause their subscriptions whenever they want. Most people use an ad-supported plan to cut costs, but 37% are willing to pay more for ad-free experiences, especially younger generations.

Consumers ultimately want to access as much content as possible while being able to keep track of their subscriptions and trying to cut costs. After all, it's easier to sign up for a provider to access a specific show and cancel it, rather than continue to pay for the service over time.

Attitudes and behaviors related to service offerings, among streaming users (Strongly agree or somewhat agree)

Total (n=1,446)



\$120

spent on cable and satellite TV per month

\$42

spent on streaming per month



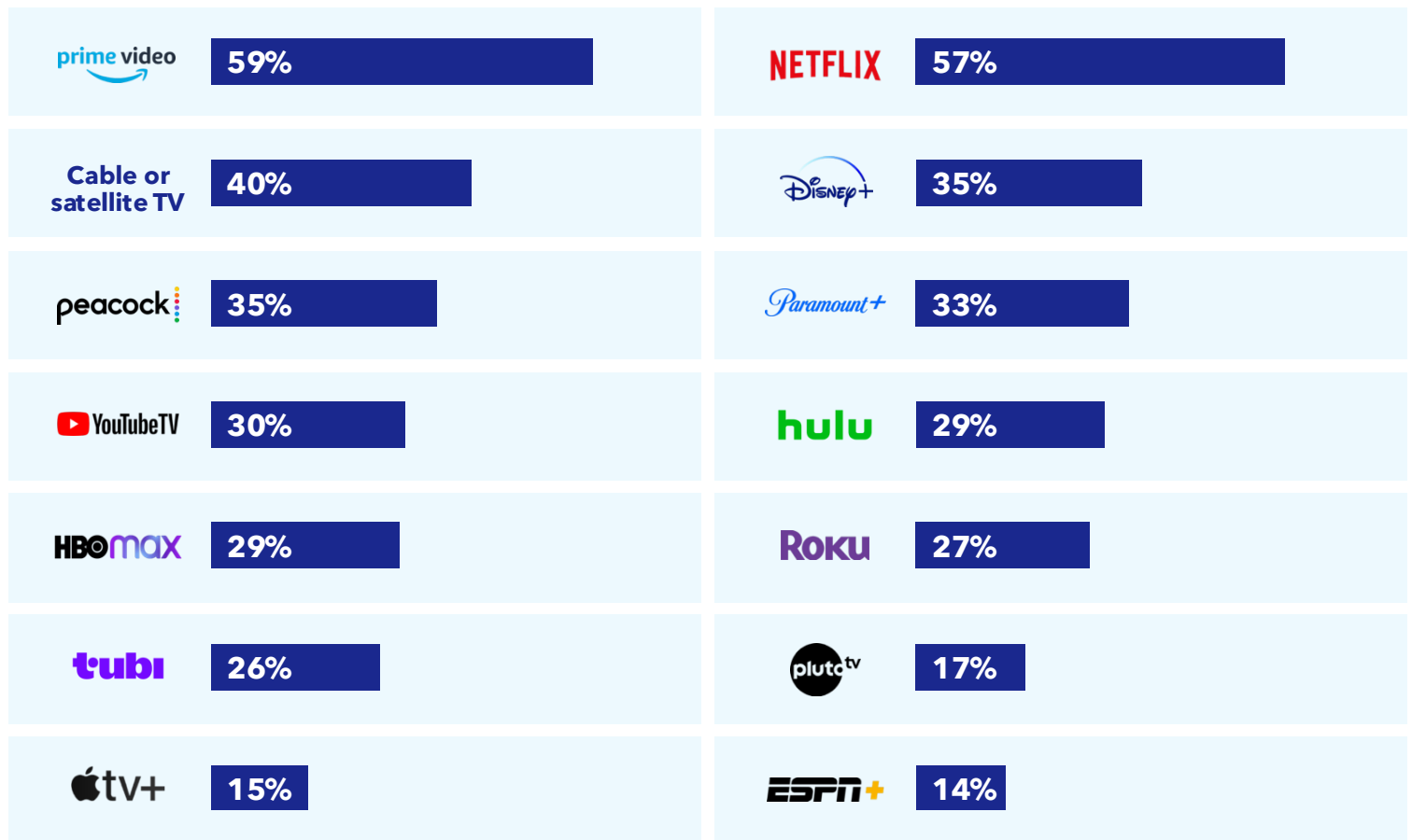
KEY FINDINGS

Even though viewers' attention is spread across an increasing number of platforms, the top players are consistent.

While cable, Netflix, YouTubeTV, Amazon Prime Video and Hulu are the top five platforms consumers use the **most often**, our data shows there are **13 platforms used by at least 15% of total respondents** (including free, ad-supported, shared and premium accounts). So even though some platforms have the heaviest usage, overall TV viewership is spread across a decent number of platforms based on individual preferences.

Channels used to watch shows, movies, sports or news

Total (n=1,627)



4.7

Average subscriptions per customer

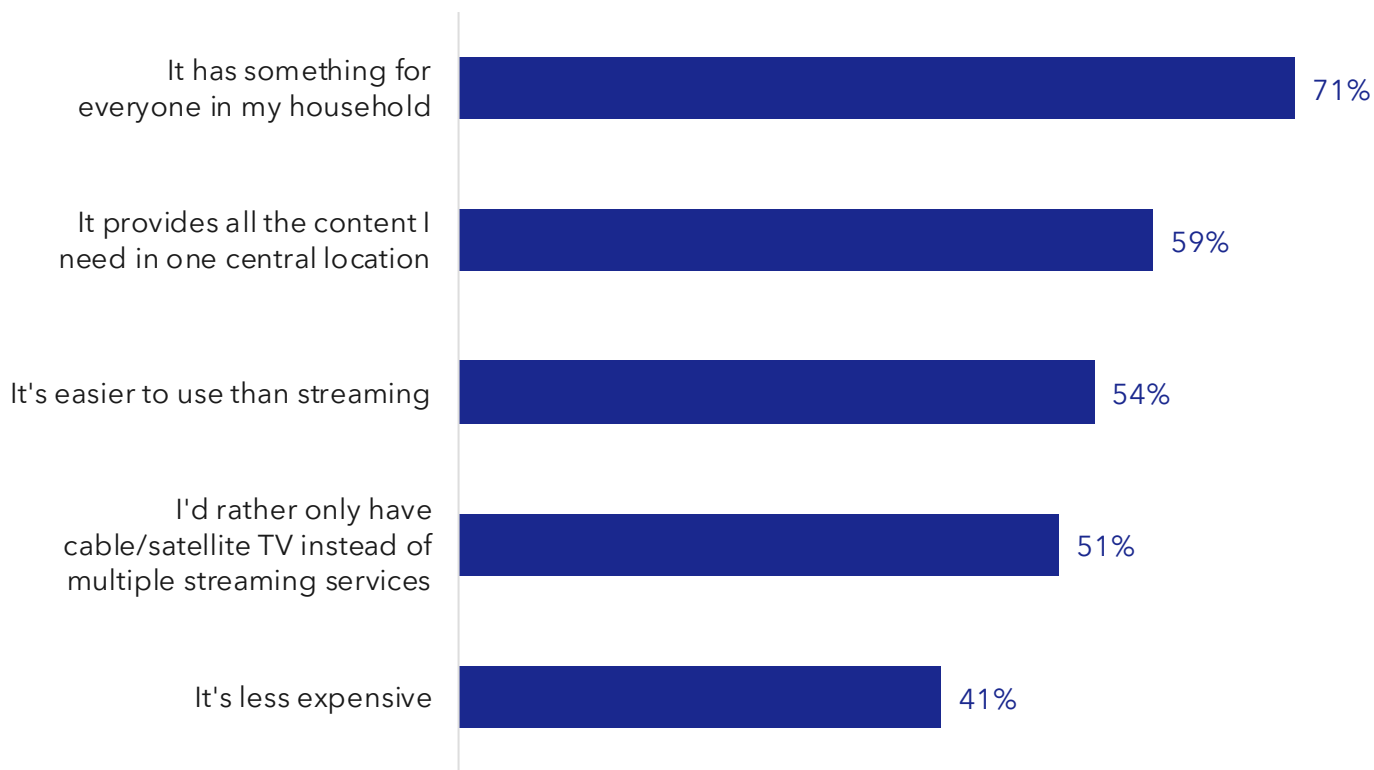


Switching to cable isn't completely off the table, especially for younger consumers.

Between subscription fatigue and rising prices to industry shifts, marketers and industry experts alike want to know if consumers will cut the (virtual) cord and revert to cable/satellite TV—or even if they'll sign up for the first time. The answer? Younger consumers are more likely, but all in all, consumers are open to it if the price is right. Consumers can also be swayed by bundling services, offering more live sports and news content and if cable/satellite providers increased the breadth of content they offered.

Why cable/satellite TV users like the service

Total (n=646)



1 in 4

would consider getting cable if streaming got too expensive or if there was a special discount or promotion.

Younger consumers, especially Gen Z who have not had cable in the recent past are more likely to consider getting cable in the next year.

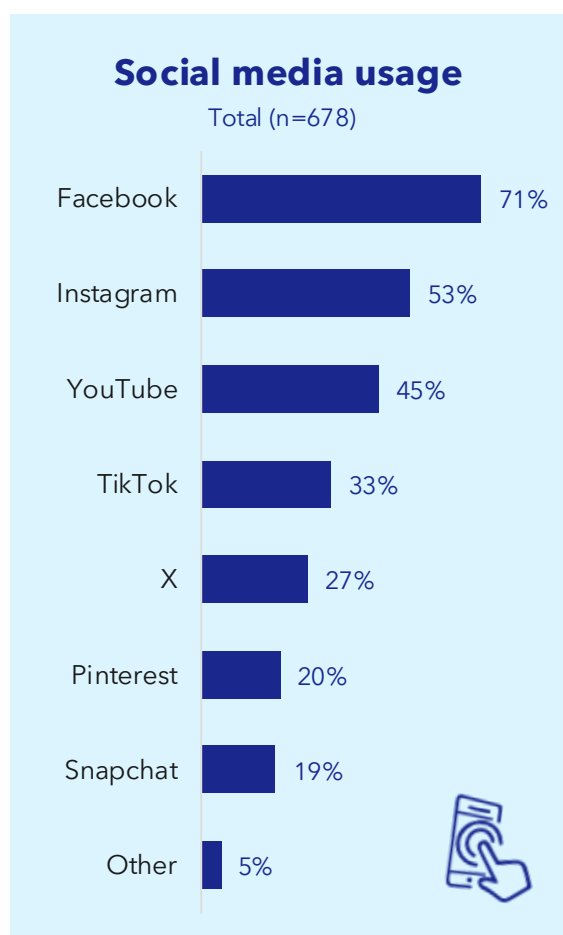


KEY FINDINGS

Double-screening isn't a passing trend— it's become a part of how we consume content.

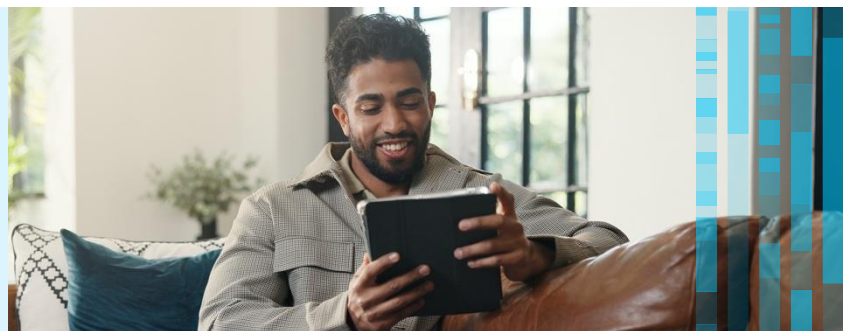
Double-screening (like when you're on your phone while catching up on *The Pitt*) is here to stay. Younger generations are slightly more likely to double-screen, but all generations partake pretty equally (and they're usually on their cell phones). Among those who scroll, Facebook and Instagram are the most frequently used platforms, followed by YouTube and TikTok. Compared to the other generations, Gen Z are the most likely to watch other shows or movies on their second device while watching content on their primary device.

Total 10 activities while double-screening	Total (n=1,249)
 On social media	54%
 Messaging/texting	51%
 Online shopping	35%
 Looking up information about what I'm watching	31%
 Working/checking work emails	29%
 Gaming	28%
 Talking to someone	27%
 Reading articles or books	17%
 Listening to music	16%
 Watching shows/movies	15%



2 in 5

double-screen often or always



Methodology

Survey respondents (total n=1,627)

To qualify for the research, respondents had to be between 18 and 77 years of age. Sample was weighted (by age and gender) to align with census distribution.

	Number of completes	Sample distribution for reporting
Gen Z (18-29 years old)	322	20%
Millennials (30-45 years old)	445	27%
Gen X (46-61 years old)	419	26%
Boomers (62-77 years old)	441	27%

This survey was in field from March 12 to March 20, 2026.

Key takeaways



Consumers are fluid, and your marketing should be too.



1 Know where your current and potential customers actually are.

When it comes to ad spending, we know consumers watch cable, Netflix, YouTubeTV, Amazon Prime Video and Hulu the most often—and those are just the top five channels. People are on many different platforms—across streaming services, cable and satellite—and you need to be able to reach them wherever they're watching.



2 Optimize to the individual.

Adtech is getting better at delivering ads across TV and streaming platforms, but there's wide variation in actual execution (and many people are saying the same thing). To connect with your audience more effectively, partner with a solution that focuses on understanding *who* you're targeting and can reach them where they're watching. That way, you know you're always relevant.



3 Reach and connect with the right people.

Marketers need to understand what matters to each consumer, engage them with a message that reflects that understanding and learn more about the individual with every interaction to inform what they say next in the conversation.

Ready to reach your audience no matter where they watch?

Reach out to an Epsilon expert

Create audiences that convert.

Know what's important to your customers and prospects to better connect with them.



Use your best customers to find more just like them.



Retarget lapsed customers with personalized incentives and loyalty rewards.



Segment customers based on key attitudes that drive purchase.

Featured audiences

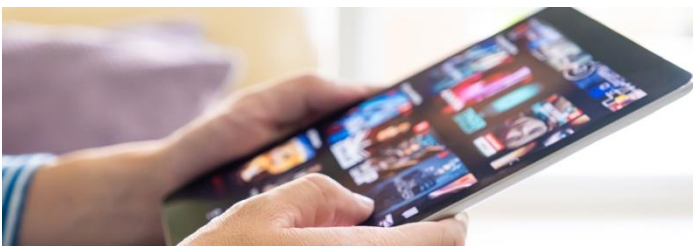
Use these featured audiences to reach your customers across channels or talk to an Epsilon expert to help you build a custom audience.



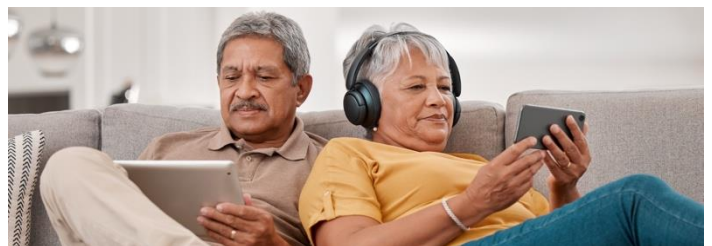
Free streaming enthusiasts



Satellite/cable TV/telecom subscribers



Paid streaming enthusiasts



Streaming video purchasers

Looking for more data?

Dive into how media consumption differs for sports viewers.



What's inside:

- Top sports watched across generations, and how much time viewers spend watching sports
- Preferred channels and devices for watching sports
- How consumers feel about commercials during sporting events, and their impact on the customer journey
- How much consumers are willing to travel for sports (and how much they're willing to spend)

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Connect people, channels and outcomes at scale by activating data and identity—the essentials of modern marketing.

Customer data platform

Unify, expand and enrich your first-party data to understand people clearly and activate across channels with privacy built in.

Loyalty

Design and evolve programs backed by activation expertise to deepen engagement and drive measurable growth.

Clean room

More than an empty container—enrich first-party data, uncover deeper insight, activate with confidence and measure impact from day one.

Digital media

Gain the clarity and control to reach real people, reduce waste and drive stronger performance across every channel.

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