EDUCAÇÃO E DESENVOLVIMENTO SOCIAL
EDUCATION AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT
EDUCACIÓN Y DESAROLLO SOCIAL

millenium

Millenium, 2(Edição Especial Nº16)

en

PADRÕES DE CONSUMO E PREFERÊNCIAS DE CONTEÚDO TELEVISIVO POR ESTUDANTES DO ENSINO SUPERIOR PORTUGUÊS

CONSUMPTION PATTERNS AND TELEVISION CONTENT PREFERENCES OF PORTUGUESE HIGHER EDUCATION STUDENTS

PADRONES DE CONSUMO Y PREFERENCIAS DE CONTENIDO TELEVISIVO DE ESTUDIANTES PORTUGUESES DE EDUCACIÓN SUPERIOR

Teresa Gouveia[1,2,3] *https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2519-6535*
Filomena Sobral[1,2,3] *https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3679-7894*

[1] Instituto Politécnico de Viseu, Viseu, Portugal
[2] Centro de Estudos em Educação e Inovação (CI&DEI), Viseu, Portugal
[3] Centro de Estudos de Comunicação e Cultura (CECC), Lisboa, Portugal

Teresa Gouveia – tgouveia@esev.ipv.pt| Filomena Sobral – filomena@esev.ipv.pt

Corresponding Author:
Teresa Gouveia
Rua Maximiano Aragão
3504 – 501 – Viseu – Portugal
tgouveia@esev.ipv.pt

RECEIVED: 05th February, 2025
REVIEWED: 06th March, 2025
ACCEPTED: 27th March, 2025
PUBLISHED: 07th April, 2025

DOI: https://doi.org/10.29352/mill0216e.40180

RESUMO

Introdução: Após ter nascido como uma tecnologia de comunicação revolucionária, e depois de ter vivenciado períodos áureos em termos de popularidade, a televisão portuguesa de sinal aberto insere-se no contexto concorrencial do mercado da atenção multiplataforma. Que perceções têm os estudantes do ensino superior desta TV *free-to-air* (FTA) e que conteúdos consomem?
Objetivo: O principal objetivo do estudo foi identificar tendências de consumo televisivo de sinal aberto de um grupo de estudantes do ensino superior português.
Métodos: Estudo de caso que, para a recolha de dados, recorreu à aplicação de um questionário online. A amostra foi constituída por 89 estudantes de comunicação e artes do Politécnico de Viseu no ano letivo 2023/2024.
Resultados: Os resultados obtidos permitem observar que os jovens continuam a consumir TV FTA no aparelho de televisão e menos em outros *gadgets* móveis e que é importante os canais de televisão de sinal aberto investirem na flexibilidade e diversificação dos conteúdos. A informação e a ficção são as preferências dos estudantes pela função de atualização e entretenimento. Destaca-se que é importante estimular o mercado interno de TV FTA a apresentar uma oferta competitiva.
Conclusão: O estudo oferece contributos de tendências de consumo televisivo FTA úteis não só para a academia, como para o contexto mediático numa área cada vez mais em competição pelo mercado da atenção.

Palavras-chave: televisão FTA; conteúdos; estudantes; consumo; ensino superior

ABSTRACT

Introduction: After emerging as a groundbreaking communication technology and experiencing periods of peak popularity, Portuguese free-to-air (FTA) television now operates in a competitive, multiplatform attention market. What are higher education students' perceptions of FTA TV, and what types of content do they consume?
Objective: The main objective of this study was to identify open-signal television consumption trends among a group of Portuguese higher education students.
Methods: A case study design was adopted, using an online questionnaire for data collection. The sample consisted of 89 communication and arts students from the Polytechnic Institute of Viseu during the 2023/2024 academic year.
Results: Findings show that young people continue to watch FTA TV on television sets more than on mobile devices, underscoring the need for broadcasters to invest in flexibility and diversified programming. News and fictional content remain the students' preferred genres, given their informational and entertainment value. Furthermore, the study highlights the importance of stimulating the domestic FTA market to offer a more competitive range of content.
Conclusion: This study provides insights into FTA television consumption trends, useful not only to the academic community but also to the broader media sector, which competes for audience attention in an increasingly competitive marketplace.

Keywords: FTA television; content; students; consumption; higher education

RESUMEN

Introducción: Después de surgir como una tecnología de comunicación revolucionaria y de experimentar períodos de gran popularidad, la televisión portuguesa en abierto (FTA) se desenvuelve ahora en un mercado de la atención cada vez más competitivo y multiplataforma. ¿Qué percepciones tienen los estudiantes de educación superior acerca de la televisión FTA y qué tipos de contenidos consumen?
Objetivo: El objetivo principal de este estudio fue identificar las tendencias de consumo de la televisión de señal abierta en un grupo de estudiantes de educación superior portugueses.
Métodos: Se adoptó un diseño de estudio de caso, recurriendo a un cuestionario en línea para la recolección de datos. La muestra estuvo compuesta por 89 estudiantes de comunicación y artes del Instituto Politécnico de Viseu durante el año académico 2023/2024.
Resultados: Los hallazgos muestran que los jóvenes continúan viendo televisión FTA principalmente en televisores, más que en dispositivos móviles, lo que pone de relieve la necesidad de que las emisoras inviertan en flexibilidad y en una programación diversificada. Las noticias y el contenido de ficción siguen siendo los géneros preferidos por los estudiantes, dados su valor informativo y de entretenimiento. Además, el estudio destaca la importancia de impulsar el mercado interno de televisión FTA para ofrecer una oferta más competitiva.
Conclusión: Este estudio proporciona información sobre las tendencias de consumo de televisión FTA, útil no solo para la comunidad académica, sino también para el sector mediático en general, que compite por la atención del público en un mercado cada vez más competitivo.

Palabras Clave: televisión FTA; contenido; estudiantes; consumo; enseñanza superior

DOI: https://doi.org/10.29352/mill0216e.40180

INTRODUCTION

At a time when streaming, social media, and the internet are widely discussed, along with the need to reinvent traditional television and reflect on its role in the lives of young people and society, it is essential to understand how these waves of transformation affect not only the medium itself but also its consumers.

Considering the nature of free-to-air (FTA) television as a vehicle for sounds, images, and representations of the world—operating in a flow that mixes genres and formats in a continuous process of feedback and fusion within a pre-established schedule of programs—the need emerges to comprehend how the new generations relate to national open-access television channels and to understand their consumption patterns as well as their content preferences.

This framework supports the present study, which draws on a questionnaire applied during the 2023/2024 academic year to a group of 89 students enrolled in communication and arts programs, most of whom are in their first cycle of higher education. Methodologically, the study employs quantitative methods for data collection and subsequent analysis.

The study's findings seek to identify trends in participants' consumption of FTA television content at a time when over-the-air broadcasters are seeking to reinvent themselves. Results show that young people continue to watch FTA channels on television sets and smart TVs, while simultaneously engaging with other mobile devices. However, it is crucial for open-signal broadcasters to invest in program quality and diversification, especially by offering innovative content. Hence, the research findings should be viewed as a means to reflect on the contemporary Portuguese media landscape.

In this regard, the text begins by focusing on the current audiovisual context of FTA television and then presents the results of the case study carried out at a Portuguese higher education institution. The multidimensional nature of the subject warrants careful attention to better understand the complexity of today's communication environment.

1. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Television and the audiovisual sector are in constant evolution and transformation, driven not only by technological developments but also by creative and aesthetic challenges, in addition to competition within the attention economy. It is well known that children (aged 9–16) are now starting to use the internet at an increasingly younger age and that it is fully integrated into their daily lives (Smahel et al., 2020). Beyond engaging in various online activities, they have also refined their digital skills, becoming young adults, whose daily routines are shaped by digitalization and by what Fialho et al. (2023, p. 20) term the "'screenification' (*ecranização*) of social relations." On the other hand, the pandemic years intensified the media trend among younger audiences to subscribe to streaming services, which offer dynamics and content not as readily available from traditional free-to-air (FTA) television broadcasters (Burnay et al., 2021).

The Audiovisual 2022 report (Cardoso & Baldi, 2022) indicates that contemporary communication is characterized by hyper-acceleration of communication flows and by a hyper-abundance of content, resulting in an expansion of both the volume and the pace of content competing for our attention. This research also underscores the strong algorithmic component and the growing *platformization* of mediated environments. Consequently, television has become more exposed "to a phenomenon of uberization, where audiovisual content is simultaneously supplied on demand and is imagined by audiences as being requestable" (Cardoso & Baldi, 2022, p. 5).

According to the *Anuário do Setor de Produção Audiovisual em Portugal* (Burnay & Ribeiro, 2023), younger generations (ages 14–25) and Millennials (ages 26–39) prefer activities such as gaming or social media interaction, given they have access to a broad range of personalized content at no additional cost. Thus, "Powered by influencers, who have the ability to form communities and capitalize on associated products and brands, these user-generated contents are gaining ground in the fight for attention and even for engagement" (Burnay & Ribeiro, 2023, p. 12).

In this environment of innovation, the paradigm of individualization expands, and opportunities for interaction and participation multiply. According to Sanganha (2021), Video on Demand platforms underscore "a phase of experimentation and exploration of consumption across different services" (p. 114).

Looking ahead to the traditional television sector, competition remains fierce, and viewers are increasingly seen as consumers—individuals to whom diverse experiences, original content, and tailor-made recommendations must be provided. After surviving predictions of its imminent demise and the years marked by the COVID-19 crisis, free-to-air television is adapting to the new landscape. Indeed, "now that the worst scenarios of a collapsing audiovisual sector are behind us, the time has come for more fundamental debates" (Haessig, 2024).

According to the 2023/2024 annual report of the European Audiovisual Observatory, which covers pan-European trends (including television), broadcasters—particularly private ones—have begun investing in production "hoping to benefit from the TV production boom triggered by the appetite of streamers for European content" (Haessig, 2024). In this way, they have addressed part of the stagnation in advertising investment and obtained production revenues that "have put them back on the growth track" (Haessig, 2024). However, the same annual report cautions that "the broadcasters themselves are the main buyers of TV series and may have to cut back on their programming expenses," and, moreover, "the growth of streamers' investments in European works should not be taken for granted at a time when most of them are not profitable yet" (Haessig, 2024).

DOI: https://doi.org/10.29352/mill0216e.40180

In Portugal, a study on the cultural practices of Portuguese people (Pais et al., 2022) corroborates television's reinvention in recent years and the need to affirm the medium's identity in the digital context. The findings confirm television's robust centrality in the media consumption habits of Portuguese audiences; in the context of the attention economy, this suggests that TV still succeeds in drawing national audiences. According to the study, nearly the entire population uses a television set for viewing, including the youngest demographic (aged 15–24), 94% of whom report watching television on a TV set. This research introduces the concept of domestication—or the integration of this medium into people's daily lives—indicating that TV has been highly flexible and adept at responding to adverse conditions, remaining central to Portuguese media practices. Lapa (2022) posits that "Regardless of the trends that may shape television's future, TV consumption remains an influential media artifact, domesticated by the vast majority of Portuguese people and structuring their daily lives" (p. 106).

Similarly, Cardoso and Baldi (2022) assert that "even for younger generations, television continues to present media relevance" (p. 16). Two studies from 2021 (Evens et al., 2021; Podara et al., 2021) corroborate these findings, revealing that around 22% of respondents say they watch traditional television daily (Evens et al., 2021) and that 16% of participants report watching television every day (Podara et al., 2021). In this sense, Cardoso and Baldi (2022) argue that "streaming services do not seem to have the capacity to completely replace traditional television" (p. 16).

Consequently, television has proven to be a resilient medium with a remarkable ability to adapt to an ever-changing media ecology. Its services—and the social recognition and value placed on it by the public—indicate its continuing robustness and relevance in today's multimedia avalanche (Pais et al., 2022). Lapa (2022) thus rejects technological determinism, considering that changes reinforce "fostering innovations in products and services" (p. 99), and underscores the reconfiguration of content and formats. Although the younger generations show substantial interest in streaming platforms and online content, this does not imply a complete lack of interest in other media practices, including free-to-air television (Lapa, 2022).

Regarding Portugal's public television service, Lopes et al. (2023) note that "[s]imilar to what is happening in other European countries, RTP needs to fine-tune its orientation to adapt to the social, technological, cultural, and economic changes we are experiencing" (p. 80).

In the contemporary communication dynamic, various strategies are being developed to capture the attention of younger audiences, raising questions about how to retain their loyalty. It is also relevant to ask how the relationship between audiences and open-access television channels will evolve. Therefore, it is crucial to understand the importance of free-to-air television in the current media experience of young people and to grasp how they relate to the traditional television industry.

2. METHODS

The methodological design of this study follows a quantitative research pattern, employing a questionnaire survey to collect data.

2.1 Sample

This study, focused on perceptions of television consumption trends on free-to-air (FTA) channels in the social media era, was carried out with communication and arts students from the Polytechnic Institute of Viseu (IPV).

The sample in this study is characterised as a convenience sample (Bryman, 2012; Hill & Hill, 2008), as it involved easily accessible participants—students from the fields of Communication and Arts at a higher education institution. According to Bryman (2012), this type of sampling is a viable option when faced with resource and time constraints, being common in exploratory research aimed at identifying trends for future studies. Hill and Hill (2008) further emphasise that, although it does not allow for statistical generalisations, it can provide valuable insights into the behaviours and perceptions of a specific group. The selection of this group is justified not only by proximity and availability but also by their potential interest in media consumption, particularly in informational and audiovisual content. As highlighted by Martino (2018) and Quivy, Campenhoudt and Marquet (2019), exploratory studies benefit from focusing on a specific universe, as this allows for a deeper exploration of key research questions, despite limitations in representativeness.

However, the adopted methodological design does not exclude future investigations involving students from other fields and regions to enhance sociodemographic variability (Cohen et al., 2018). Thus, following Flick (2009), the chosen sampling approach aligns with the objectives of an exploratory study, allowing for the formulation of hypotheses for broader research.

The sample comprises 89 higher-education students, who participated anonymously and voluntarily. These participants span various age groups, primarily young adults: 55% are between 20 and 22 years old, 30% are between 17 and 19, 9% are between 23 and 25, and 6% are 26 or older. In terms of gender distribution, most respondents identify as female (65%, or 58 participants), followed by those identifying as male (28%, or 25 participants), and 7% who identify as another gender (6 participants). Nearly all respondents (88) are undergraduates, which represents 99% of the sample.

Regarding year of enrollment, the most statistically significant group is second-year students (36 respondents, accounting for 40% of the total survey participants). Meanwhile, 32 participants (36%) indicated they are in their third year, and 21 respondents (24%) are in their first year.

DOI: https://doi.org/10.29352/mill0216e.40180

Student participation in the study was guaranteed under conditions of anonymity, and all data were processed in accordance with the General Data Protection Regulation (2016), used solely for statistical and academic purposes. Informed consent was obtained from all participants.

2.2 Data Collection Instruments

Data for this study were gathered using a structured questionnaire, administered digitally through an online survey platform. As mentioned, the questionnaire was designed to identify preferences and consumption patterns of FTA television content among communication and arts students at IPV.

The questionnaire consists of several sections covering the following dimensions:

- Demographic Data: Includes questions such as participants' gender and age range, allowing for the characterization of the respondent profile.
- Television Consumption: Questions about TV viewing patterns, including how often participants watch open-access television channels and their content preferences (news, entertainment, fiction, etc.).
- Viewing Platforms: Participants were asked about the platforms they use to access free-to-air television content (TV set, smart TV, streaming platforms, social media, etc.).
- Influencing Factors: The questionnaire also explores factors that influence FTA television consumption, such as program quality, convenience of access platforms, and the popularity of content on social media.

Responses were collected via Likert-type scales (e.g., on a scale of 1 to 5), multiple-choice questions, and open-ended questions, thereby gathering both quantitative and qualitative data. The questionnaire was available from May 20, 2024, to June 15, 2024.

3. RESULTS

The results (Table 1) indicate diverse patterns of open-access television consumption among participants. A total of 27 students reported watching free-to-air television rarely, accounting for around 30% of the sample. The second most selected option was several times per week, with 19 responses (21%), suggesting a regular, though not daily, viewing habit. In contrast, 14 respondents (16%) stated they watch free-to-air television daily. Meanwhile, 10 participants (11%) indicated watching once or twice a week, followed by 8 respondents who reported watching almost every day (9%) or not watching at all (9%). Only 3 participants (3%) mentioned that they view television on specific days of the week, reflecting a more structured consumption pattern.

Table 1 - Distribution of the frequency of free-to-air television viewing among participants

Frequency*	Number of Responses	Percentage
Daily	14	16%
Almost every day	8	9%
A few times a week	19	21%
Once or twice a week	10	11%
Rarely	27	30%
Never	8	9%
On specific days of the week	3	3%

(* Total respondents: 89)

In the question concerning the frequency of free-to-air television (FTA) viewing, only 3 participants selected the option "On specific days of the week" to describe their FTA television consumption habits. However, in the subsequent open-ended question, 12 participants provided answers specifying days on which they watch television. This discrepancy suggests that the open-ended format prompted more detailed responses about specific viewing days and indicates that some participants watch television on convenient days rather than following a strict routine.

Among those who indicated watching television on "specific days of the week," five main behavioral patterns were identified: (1) a preference for weekends, (2) specific weekdays, (3) flexible schedules depending on circumstances, (4) preference for specific channels over specific days, and (5) social context. Eight of the 12 responses (approximately 67%) mentioned the weekend, with days such as Saturday and Sunday specifically noted. Three participants (25%) indicated specific weekdays, such as Tuesday, Thursday, or Friday, possibly tied to regular programs aired on those days. Two respondents (17%) noted that their choice of viewing days is not fixed and depends on the moment or on scheduling availability. Answers such as "it depends on the moment" reflect sporadic consumption patterns, wherein the decision to watch television is made according to the day's routine or commitments.

One participant mentioned specific channels—SIC Notícias, RTP 1, and Porto Canal—instead of specifying days of the week, suggesting that this viewer prioritizes certain content or types of programming, such as news, broadcast throughout the week rather than on fixed days. For this respondent, channel content appears more relevant than the day of the week. One participant

DOI: https://doi.org/10.29352/mill0216e.40180

also associated the consumption of FTA television with a social context, indicating they watch it "on weekends, at my parents' house."

An analysis of the times of day participants watches national FTA television reveals clear patterns of consumption (Table 2). Most respondents reported watching television during dinnertime (8:00 p.m. – 10:00 p.m.), with 66 responses (about 74% of the total). This period aligns with a typical time for relaxation and family socializing, traditionally linked to news broadcasts and entertainment programs. Another popular time slot is late evening (10:00 p.m. – 12:00 a.m.), with 36 responses (40%), suggesting that many participants continue watching television after dinner, often for entertainment programs or movies.

Lunchtime (12:00 p.m. – 2:00 p.m.) was also a notable viewing period, cited by 29 participants (33%), possibly due to midday meal breaks. Late afternoon (6:00 p.m. – 8:00 p.m.) ranked next, with 25 responses (28%), followed by afternoon (2:00 p.m. – 6:00 p.m.) with 8 responses (9%), and after midnight (post–12:00 a.m.), with 9 responses (10%). Less common were morning slots (9:00 a.m. – 12:00 p.m.), with 6 responses (7%), and early morning (7:00 a.m. – 9:00 a.m.), with 4 responses (4%). These lower percentages reflect reduced television consumption during these times.

Table 2 - Viewing Times and Average Daily Consumption of National Free-to-Air Television Channels

Time of Day*	Number of Responses	Percentage
Early morning (7 am – 9 pm)	4	4%
During the morning (9 am – 12 pm)	6	7%
At lunchtime (12pm – 2pm)	29	33%
During the afternoon (2 pm – 6 pm)	8	9%
In the late afternoon (6 pm – 8 pm)	25	28%
During dinner (8pm – 10pm)	66	74%
Night (22h – 24h)	36	40%
Dawn (After 24h)	9	10%
Daily Consumption Time**		
Less than 30 minutes	18	20%
30 minutes to 1 hour	29	33%
1 to 2 hours	17	19%
3 hours	10	11%
3 to 4 hours	2	2%
More than 4 hours	4	4%
Another option	1	1%

(* Total respondents: 81 | ** Total respondents: 81)

Data on the daily average consumption of national free-to-air (FTA) television channels (Table 2) show that the largest statistically significant category is those who watch between 30 minutes and 1 hour per day, with 29 responses (33% of the total). This consumption pattern reflects a routine in which television is viewed every day by the highest number of survey respondents. The second most common category is participants who watch television for less than 30 minutes per day, comprising 18 responses (20%). This finding suggests that these respondents have lower levels of FTA TV consumption.

Another 17 participants (19%) indicated watching television for 1 to 2 hours per day, reflecting a moderately longer, regular viewing pattern. Meanwhile, 10 respondents (11%) reported spending 3 hours per day watching FTA television, and 2 participants (2%) said they watch between 3 and 4 hours daily. Four participants (4%) mentioned watching television for more than 4 hours per day, pointing to a higher level of consumption. Finally, only 1 participant selected "Other," indicating a viewing pattern that did not fit the provided time intervals.

Based on the data in Table 2, it can be observed that most participants either watch FTA television for 30 minutes to 1 hour or for less than 30 minutes per day. Only a small portion of respondents have more intensive viewing habits, watching 3 hours or more of television daily.

In Table 2—concerning the Daily Average Television Consumption of National Free-to-Air Channels—there was 1 response in the "Other" category. In response to the subsequent question, "If you selected 'Other' in Question 9, please specify," the participant answered: "I rarely watch TV, but when I do, it's no more than 2 hours." This indicates sporadic, limited use, where television plays a secondary role in this individual's daily life. Such behaviour is consistent with the trends shown in Table 3, in which a majority of respondents (53%) watch FTA TV for 30 minutes to 1 hour or less than 30 minutes per day, and 19% watch between 1 and 2 hours daily. These data indicate that for part of the sample, free-to-air television is consumed briefly and, potentially, only occasionally.

Referring to Table 3, nearly half of the participants reported using a Smart TV as their primary device to watch national FTA channels, with 42 responses (47%). This result highlights the popularity of Smart TVs, which offer advanced features such as internet connectivity and the ability to access streaming services in addition to traditional channels. Standard TV sets rank second, with 30 responses (34%). Although Smart TV usage is on the rise, there remains a considerable segment of participants who rely on conventional television devices.

DOI: https://doi.org/10.29352/mill0216e.40180

Computers are the third most common choice, with 8 responses (9%), possibly indicating more flexible environments or multitasking contexts in which a single device is used for both work and entertainment. Only 1 participant (1%) reported using a smartphone as their primary device to watch free-to-air channels, suggesting that mobile consumption of television is not very prevalent among these respondents. No participants reported using tablets or other devices, reflecting a preference for the devices that provide a broader viewing experience for TV content.

Table 3 - Most Common Device for Watching National Free-to-Air Television Channels

Device*	Number of Responses	Percentage
TV Standard	30	34%
Smart TV	42	47%
Computer	8	9%
Tablet	0	0%
Smartphone	1	1%
Other devices	0	0%

(* Total respondents: 81)

Most participants reported watching national free-to-air (FTA) television channels at home (Table 4), with 79 respondents (about 89% of the total). This finding indicates that FTA television viewing largely remains a domestic activity, associated with leisure and relaxation within a family environment. Only 1 participant (1%) mentioned watching television at the university, suggesting that FTA television consumption in educational or work settings is rare. Similarly, just 1 participant reported watching television at a café, indicating that television consumption in public places is uncommon among the respondents. No one indicated watching television on public transport or in other locations, reinforcing the strong association between open-access television consumption and the home environment.

Table 4 - Location and Part of the House in Which Participants Regularly Watch National Free-To-Air Television Channels

Location*	Number of Responses	Percentage
At home	79	89%
At university	1	1%
In the café	1	1%
On public transport	0	0%
Preferred part of the house for viewing**		
In the living room	66	88%
In the room	9	12%

(* Total Respondents: 81) (** Total Respondents: 75)

Among respondents who watch television at home, the vast majority prefer doing so in the living room, with 66 responses (88% of the total). This finding reflects the traditional role of the living room as the primary space for socializing and TV viewing in many households, as it usually contains the main television set. Only 9 participants (12%) said they watch television in their bedroom, suggesting that for a small segment of respondents, television consumption takes place in a more private, personal setting. This habit may be tied to a preference for individual leisure time, allowing for uninterrupted viewing without competing with other family activities (Table 4).

As shown in Table 5, 43 participants mentioned that they occasionally discuss what they watch on national free-to-air channels with friends, representing approximately 48% of the total. This result suggests that while such content is not a daily conversation topic, it sometimes arises in social contexts. Twenty-six participants (29%) said they rarely discuss what they watch on these channels, indicating that, for some respondents, it is not a common subject of conversation. Seven participants (8%) noted that they frequently talk about television content with friends, reflecting a smaller group for whom the topic is more relevant. Finally, five respondents (5%) mentioned never discussing their FTA television viewing habits, and no respondent indicated that they always engage in these conversations.

A large majority of participants (67 responses, roughly 75% of the total) reported watching national FTA television with their family (Table 5), indicating that open-access television consumption remains a shared, family-based activity. This highlights television's social function as a medium of entertainment and interaction. Eleven participants (12%) stated they typically watch television alone, suggesting that, for some, television is more of a solitary form of entertainment. Only three participants (3%) indicated watching television with friends, implying that viewing with peers, while less common, does occur occasionally. None of the respondents selected the option of watching television with "other" groups, indicating no reported viewing with social circles beyond family or friends.

DOI: https://doi.org/10.29352/mill0216e.40180

Table 5 - Frequency of Conversations with Friends and Social Context of FTA Television Consumption

Talk frequency*	Number of Responses	Percentage
Never	5	5%
Rarely	26	29%
Sometimes	43	48%
Often	7	8%
All the time	0	0%
As you usually watch**		
Alone	11	12%
With friends	3	3%
With family	67	75%
With other people	0	0%

(* Total respondents: 81 | ** Total respondents: 81)

The most frequently mentioned national free-to-air (FTA) channel is SIC (Table 6), with 31 responses, corresponding to about 38% of the total 81 answers in this question. TVI is the second most-viewed channel, cited by 26 respondents (32%), followed by RTP1, with 16 responses (20%). RTP2 was selected by 7 participants (9%), whereas RTP3 was mentioned by only 1 participant (1%).
These data indicate that SIC is the preferred channel for most respondents, possibly due to its programming. TVI also has a strong presence, ranking second in viewership. Together, SIC and TVI represent 70% of the reported preferences, suggesting a clear tendency among participants toward private free-to-air channels.
Although RTP1 is the main public television channel, it is the third most viewed among the respondents. This finding may suggest that RTP1's programming does not align as closely with the interests and preferences of this specific group of communication and arts students. RTP2 and RTP3 attracted notably fewer viewers, likely reflecting the more specialized nature of their content.
Overall, these viewing patterns underscore the stronger appeal of private channels for younger audiences. By contrast, public channels appear to have lower traction in this demographic—a challenge for RTP if it seeks to attract and retain younger viewers.

Table 6 - National Free-to-Air Television Channels Most Frequently Watched and Programming Preferences

Channel*	Number of Responses	Percentage (%)
SIC	31	38%
TVI	26	32%
RTP1	16	20%
RTP2	7	9%
RTP3	1	1%
Programming Type**		
Information	43	53%
Movies	42	52%
Documentaries	30	37%
Series	26	32%
Sport	23	28%
Soap operas	21	26%
Reality-shows	21	26%
Children's cartoons/programs	20	25%
Contests	19	23%
Debates	13	16%
Talk-shows	12	15%
Music	7	9%
Religious Programs	1	1%
Other	1	1%

(* Total respondents: 81 | ** Total respondents: 81)

Most participants indicated that news is the type of programming they watch most frequently on national FTA channels (Table 6), with 43 responses (approximately 53% of the 81 participants). This finding highlights the viewers' interest in staying informed about current events. Films are the second most-watched type of programming, with 42 participants (about 52%) reporting frequent viewing, reflecting the respondents' strong preference for cinematic content. Documentaries also enjoy a considerable audience—30 responses (37%)—suggesting notable interest in documentary formats beyond standard news coverage.
Series were selected by 26 participants (32%), showing that serialized narratives appeal to a substantial share of respondents. Sports programming was chosen by 23 participants (28%), indicating that more than a quarter of respondent's value sports content. Telenovelas and reality shows were each mentioned by 21 participants (26%), signifying notable audience interest in these genres among the survey group. Cartoons/children's programs were selected by 20 participants (25%), possibly reflecting

DOI: https://doi.org/10.29352/mill0216e.40180

personal enjoyment or viewing alongside younger family members. Competitions were chosen by 19 participants (23%), pointing to interest in game and quiz shows. Debates and talk shows had 13 (16%) and 12 (15%) responses, respectively, indicating smaller yet still relevant audiences for these formats. Music programming was chosen by 7 participants (9%), reflecting a lower preference for musical content on free-to-air channels. Religious programs and the "Other" category were each mentioned by 1 participant (1%), indicating minimal interest in these types of programming.

An analysis of the most frequently mentioned individual programs among participants (Table 7) reveals that news programs, with a total of 16 responses (about 20% of the 81 participants), rank highest. This result underscores the respondents' desire to stay informed on current events.

"Taskmaster" was mentioned by 5 participants (6%), standing out as one of the most popular entertainment programs among respondents. "Isto é Gozar com Quem Trabalha" was selected by 4 participants (5%), indicating an appreciation for humor and political satire.

Other mentioned programs include "Terra Nossa," with 3 responses (4%), and "Big Brother," also with 3 responses (4%). The soap opera "Cacau" was also noted by 3 participants (4%), reflecting an interest in national fictional productions. Eight participants (10%) indicated that they do not have a specific favorite program or were unable to name one.

Most respondents reported frequently watching real-time broadcasts on national free-to-air channels (Table 7), with 53 affirmative responses (approximately 65% of the 81 participants). This finding demonstrates that live programming continues to play a significant role in these participants' television consumption habits.

On the other hand, 28 participants (about 35%) reported that they do not regularly watch live content on these channels, possibly reflecting a preference for recorded broadcasts or on-demand content through digital platforms.

Table 7 - Most Mentioned Programs, Viewing Preferences, and Live Content on National FTA Channels

Program*	Number of Responses	Percentage (%)
TV News/Information	16	20%
Taskmaster	5	6%
Isto é Gozar com Quem Trabalha	4	5%
Terra Nossa	3	4%
Big Brother	3	4%
Cacau	3	4%
Preço Certo	2	2%
Eurovisão	2	2%
Dois às 10	2	2%
Somos Portugal	2	2%
None/Don't know/Don't have	8	10%
Other programs (unique answers)	32	40%
Watch live content**		
Yes	53	65%
No	28	35%
Types of live content		
News/Information	40	75%
Sports	22	42%
Cultural events	17	32%
Other	4	8%

(* Total respondents: 81 | ** Total Respondents: 81 | Note: the total number of responses exceeds the number of respondents (53) because respondents could select multiple options)

Of the 53 participants who answered "Yes" to the question about whether they regularly watch live broadcasts on national free-to-air (FTA) television channels, a follow-up query asked which types of live content they watch (Table 7). The majority indicated watching News/Information, with 40 responses—approximately 75% of those surveyed—underscoring the significance of news programs as key sources for staying current on national and international events. The second most common interest was Live Sports, with 22 responses (42%), highlighting the appeal of live competitions and games. The excitement and unpredictability inherent in sports broadcasts may strengthen viewers' attraction to these programs. Cultural events also drew substantial attention, with 17 respondents (32%) reporting an interest in live broadcasts of festivals, concerts, and other artistic events, suggesting that many participants value access to real-time cultural and arts content. Lastly, 8% of respondents (4 answers) indicated a preference for other types of content not listed among the provided options, pointing to diverse viewing interests.

Among participants who selected "Other" regarding the types of live content they watch on national FTA channels, most mentioned reality shows, followed by telenovelas and competitions. Three of the four participants who chose "Other" specified reality shows as one of their preferred types of programming, while telenovelas and game shows were each mentioned once.

DOI: https://doi.org/10.29352/mill0216e.40180

4. DISCUSSION

The findings of this study situate higher education students' television consumption dynamics within a context where free-to-air television and the audiovisual sector are facing technological, cultural, and social challenges. As identified by Smahel et al. (2020) and Fialho et al. (2023), younger generations grow up in digital environments, begin using the internet very early, and adapt seamlessly to new media formats, integrating both traditional and emerging platforms. This integration does not exclude free-to-air television from their media ecosystem.

Our research underscores the persistence of free-to-air television, despite the proliferation of access devices and new video on demand (VoD) and streaming services. Although the data show that only 16% of participants watch FTA television daily and that a substantial portion do so sporadically or occasionally, linear television has not been entirely displaced. On the contrary, consumption is often tied to specific times of day, especially "dinnertime," suggesting the importance of the family and social dimension of viewing—a notion supported by literature emphasizing the "domestication" of television (Pais et al., 2022; Lapa, 2022). This finding aligns with perspectives that regard television as a structuring media artifact in everyday life, even among younger audiences.

This balance between recognizing linear TV as a domesticated, established medium and the flexibility of selective consumption (on specific days, weekends, or post-work/school hours) indicates that television is not discarded in the face of abundant online options. At the same time, the living room remains a central viewing space, reinforcing the social character of family-based television consumption—even as individual viewing on personal devices continues to rise (Lapa, 2022).

The fact that Smart TVs are the most frequently used device suggests a trend of technological convergence: these televisions allow access to both linear channels and streaming platforms, corroborating the scenario described by Cardoso and Baldi (2022). Today, watching television easily spans both linear broadcasts and on-demand catalogues.

The results further confirm the resilience of free-to-air channels, as highlighted by Cardoso and Baldi (2022) and Pais et al. (2022). SIC and TVI emerged as the top preferred channels, surpassing RTP1 among these respondents, potentially signalling challenges for the public service broadcaster in attracting younger audiences (Lopes et al., 2023). News and films appear to hold appeal for this demographic, although series, documentaries, and entertainment formats also garnered interest. Such program diversity aligns with the ongoing need to reconfigure content and formats to match evolving audience tastes and habits (Lapa, 2022).

Moreover, the relevance of "live" content reflects a competitive advantage for free-to-air television—offering immediate, up-to-date newscasts, sports, and cultural events that provide an authentic, real-time media experience. This feature aligns with literature suggesting that live broadcasts are a key advantage of linear television, one not easily replicated by purely streaming-based models (Podara et al., 2021; Evens et al., 2021).

Additionally, although television continues to feature in young people's daily routines, its status as a central source of cultural debate may be waning among this demographic. This decrease in discussion may be linked to the fragmentation of attention and media consumption, with shared experiences shifting toward digital spaces, algorithmic recommendations, and the influence of creators and influencers (Burnay & Ribeiro, 2023).

Overall, the results indicate that, despite the proliferation of digital platforms and the "screenification" of social life, free-to-air television is not an obsolete medium for the young audience analysed here. Instead, it remains capable of adapting and retaining a place through accessibility, its domestic presence, its informational value, and the persistence of social viewing routines. Nonetheless, to remain attractive to digitally immersed generations, free-to-air television must invest in original content, cultural relevance, personalized recommendations, and in aligning its identity with new habits—integrating itself into a broader media ecology, as noted by Haessig (2024) and Sanganha (2021). The ability to attract and retain new audiences will hinge on broadcasters' resilience and creativity, given a highly competitive environment marked by abundant content and fragmented attention.

CONCLUSION

This study aimed to understand how free-to-air (FTA) television remains resilient in an increasingly fragmented and competitive media landscape.

By focusing on the perspectives of a group of students from a higher education institution in Portugal, the research sought to identify consumption patterns, preferences, platforms used, and key factors influencing their viewing of national free-to-air television channels.

The findings indicate that, despite the broad range of digital offerings and the growing importance of streaming, FTA television continues to play a role in these young people's daily routines. Although most do not watch it daily or intensively, television viewing remains associated with specific times of day (for instance, dinnertime), domestic spaces (such as the living room), and social contexts (family gatherings). News programs, entertainment, and both national and international fiction retain a place in respondents' media repertoires, despite the clear trend toward online content and on-demand flexibility. The adoption of Smart TVs further underscores technological convergence, indicating that, even in a digitized ecosystem, linear television can coexist alongside streaming platforms and interactive applications.

DOI: https://doi.org/10.29352/mill0216e.40180

It is important to note that these data represent a specific group of students and therefore may not be generalized to the wider youth population, constituting one of this study's limitations. Additionally, self-reported data can introduce biases in perceived consumption. Future research could expand the study's sociodemographic and methodological scope, as well as further investigate the interaction between free-to-air television and other platforms (streaming, social media, video games), thereby providing a more comprehensive understanding of how traditional TV adapts to youth audiences' preferences in a multiplatform environment.

Free-to-air television has not disappeared under the wave of digital media. It continues to serve a relevant function, adapting to new technological and social realities and reaffirming its presence in an evolving media landscape. While localized and subject to the limitations, these findings offer insights into the challenges facing free-to-air television, as well as potential strategies for reinvention and continued relevance in the digital era, opening avenues for further research.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This work is funded by National Funds through the FCT – Fundação para a Ciência e a Tecnologia, I.P., under the project Ref. UIDB/05507/2020 with DOI https://doi.org/10.54499/UIDB/05507/2020. We additionally acknowledge the support provided by the Centro de Estudos em Educação e Inovação (Ci&DEI) and the Polytechnic Institute of Viseu.

AUTHOR'S CONTRIBUTION

Conceptualization, T.G. and F.S.; data curation, T.G. and F.S.; formal analysis, T.G. and F.S.; investigation, T.G. and F.S.; methodology, T.G. and F.S.; writing-original draft, T.G. and F.S.; writing-review and editing, T.G. and F.S.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

REFERENCES

Bryman, A. (2012). *Social research methods* (4ª ed.). Oxford University Press. https://ktpu.kpi.ua/wp-content/uploads/2014/02/social-research-methods-alan-bryman.pdf

Burnay, C. D., & Ribeiro, N. (2023). *Anuário do setor de produção audiovisual em Portugal 2022*. Universidade Católica Portuguesa.https://www.apitv.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/240506-ANUARIO-UCP-23-DIGITAL.pdf

Burnay, C. D., Lopes, P., Sousa, M. N. de, Félix, J., & Carvalho, A. L. (2021). Portugal: Diretiva europeia "serviços de comunicação audiovisual a pedido": O princípio do fim da monocultura da telenovela? In M. I. Lopes (Coord.), *Anuário Obitel 2021 - A ficção televisiva em tempos de pandemia* (pp. 357-392). Ediciones Universidad Católica de Chile. https://doi.org/10.7764/obitel.21.S.11

Cardoso, G., & Baldi, V. (2022). *Audiovisual 2022: Paradigmas de consumo e de evolução da indústria em Portugal e Europa*. Obercom. https://obercom.pt/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/Audiovisual_2022_Final_15Mar.pdf

Cohen, L., Manion, L., & Morrison, K. (2018). *Research methods in education* (8ª ed.). Routledge.

Evens, T., Henderickx, A., & De Marez, L. (2021). Generation stream: The audiovisual repertoire of teenagers. *Journal of Broadcasting & Electronic Media, 65*(2), 185-204. https://doi.org/10.1080/08838151.2021.1944146

Fialho, J., Martins, I. C., Caraça, L., & Oliveira, A. (2023). *Scroll. Logo existo! : Comportamentos aditivos no uso dos ecrãs*. Universidade Lusíada Editora. http://repositorio.ulusiada.pt/bitstream/11067/7244/4/fialho_scroll.pdf

Flick, U. (2009). *Introdução à pesquisa qualitativa* (3ª ed.). Bookman.

Haessig, V. (Ed.). (2024). *Yearbook 2023/2024: Key trends television, cinema, video and on-demand audiovisual services - The pan-European picture*. European Audiovisual Observatory. https://rm.coe.int/yearbook-key-trends-2023-2024-en/1680aef0c0

Hill, M. M., & Hill, A. (2008). *Investigação por questionário* (2ª ed.). Edições Sílabo.

Lapa, T. (2022). A domesticação da televisão e da rádio na era digital «pós-radiodifusão». In J. M. Pais, M. L. Antunes, & P. Magalhães (Eds.), *Práticas culturais dos portugueses – Inquérito 2020* (pp. 99-142). Imprensa de Ciências Sociais. https://repositorio.iscte-iul.pt/bitstream/10071/31954/1/bookPart_86965.pdf

Lopes, F. (Ed.). (2023). *Serviço público de média: Livro branco*. Editorial do Ministério da Educação e Ciência. https://www.culturaportugal.gov.pt/media/12019/servic-o-pu-blico-de-me-dia.pdf

DOI: https://doi.org/10.29352/mill0216e.40180

Martino, L. M. S. (2018). *Métodos de pesquisa em comunicação: Projetos, ideias, práticas*. Editora Vozes Limitada. https://pt.scribd.com/document/606380909/LIVRO-Metodos-de-Pesquisa-Em-Comunicacao-Luis-Mauro-Sa-Martino

Pais, J. M., Antunes, M. L., & Magalhães, P. (Eds.). (2022). *Práticas culturais dos portugueses – Inquérito 2020*. Imprensa de Ciências Sociais. https://www.ics.ulisboa.pt/sites/ics.ulisboa.pt/files/2022/inquerito_praticas_culturais_2020.pdf

Podara, A., Matsiola, M., Kotsakis, R., Maniou, T. A., & Kalliris, G. (2021). Generation Z's screen culture: Understanding younger users' behaviour in the television streaming age – The case of post-crisis Greece. *Critical Studies in Television, 16*(2), 91-109. https://doi.org/10.1177/17496020211005395

Quivy, R., Van Campenhoudt, L., & Marquet, J. (2019). *Manual de investigação em ciências sociais* (2ª ed.). Gradiva. https://www.fep.up.pt/docentes/joao/material/manualinvestig.pdf

Sanganha, A. S. (2021). Homo *Streamius Lusitanus*: Uma breve análise sobre o recente comportamento do espectador português em serviços de streaming e video-on-demand. *Revista de Comunicação e Linguagens, 55*. https://repositorio-aberto.up.pt/bitstream/10216/162570/2/695049.pdf

Smahel, D., Machackova, H., Mascheroni, G., Dedkova, L., Staksrud, E., Ólafsson, K., Livingstone, S., & Hasebrink, U. (2020). *EU Kids Online 2020: Survey results from 19 countries*. EU Kids Online. https://www.eukidsonline.ch/files/Eu-kids-online-2020-international-report.pdf