

Screen time

TV penetration rose from 99 million to 109 million in rural India, and from 20 million to 21 million in mega cities between 2016 and 2018

No. of homes with TVs in India

■ 2016 ■ 2018 (in million)



Source: Broadcast India 2018 Survey



India's online video audience (in million)



Source: Ficci-EY Report

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Rural Indians are not giving up their TVs that easily, says Barc

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At a time when Hotstar, Netflix and Amazon Prime Video are battling it out for mind-share in India's urban homes, television viewership continues to grow, especially in the countryside. TV viewership in rural India rose 10% between 2016 and 2018 while in urban areas, it grew 4% over the same period, the Broadcast India 2018 Survey conducted by Broadcast Audience Research Council India (Barc) showed.

TV penetration rose from 99 million to 109 million in rural India and from 20 million to 21 million in the mega cities—Delhi, Mumbai, Kolkata and Bengaluru—during the period, the viewership monitoring agency said.

The survey also shows a 6.9% increase in male viewers (from 401 million to 429 million) versus a 7.5% jump in female TV viewers (from 378 million to 407 million). The viewership figures come at a time when many people have switched to online streaming.

Ficci-EY's media and entertainment industry report in 2017 estimates that 127 million smartphones were sold in the country by the end of that December while 250 million people viewed videos online for news and entertainment.

But obviously, TV isn't going away in a hurry.

"One reason for the preference for TV is the size of the screen, sound and picture quality," said Abneesh Roy, an analyst with Edelweiss Securities. "Only if the household has one TV set does the phone come in," he said, adding that the advent of state broadcaster Doordarshan's free-to-air direct-to-home platform DD Free Dish is hugely responsible for the continuing dependence on TV in rural areas. Apart from spending once on equipment such as a set-top box and a dish, Free Dish consumers do not need to pay any monthly subscription fee. Rural audiences are, therefore, hooked to the dated content on these channels.

"This data needs to be looked at in nuanced, qualitative ways. For example, even if TV viewership is growing in absolute numbers, what is the kind of time spent and lapsed or how many daily active users there are and in which regions," said Sameer Nair, chief executive officer at content studio Applause Entertainment, which makes shows for video-streaming platforms. Nair added that television may be a staple in most homes but is also an ageing medium.

"The television and digital media are already co-existing, it's a matter of how much time people give to what," he said.