



Key Findings from TV Ratings Research

Methodology

In an effort to assess awareness, use, and satisfaction with the current rating system in place for TV programming among parents and teens, Public Opinion Strategies and Hart Research Associates conducted two internet-based surveys on behalf of the TV Parental Guidelines Monitoring Board:

- A national survey of 1,001 parents of children 2-17 years old, November 15-22, 2011; and
- A national survey of 500 teens, ages 13-17, December 4-18, 2011.

1. The awareness and favorability ratings for the TV ratings system are notably high among both teens and parents.

Roughly nine out of ten parents and eight out of ten teens are aware broadcast and cable networks provide parental ratings for television programs. Roughly the same percentages of parents and teens are aware these ratings appear before the start of shows. Similar proportions feel comfortable in their knowledge of the parental ratings system: roughly nine out of ten parents and eight out of ten teens say they understand the ratings well.

Parents view the ratings system quite favorably with roughly seven out of ten parents having a favorable opinion and just 9% holding an unfavorable opinion.

Parents most often say in their verbatim responses that they feel favorably toward the system because:

- The ratings provide guidelines to help them make decisions.
- Ratings are reasonable.
- Ratings are accurate and clear.
- Ratings provide some peace of mind and make life a little easier.
- Parents feel more in control.

Among the 9% of parents who have an unfavorable opinion of the TV ratings system, there was a division in opinion with some saying the ratings are "too lenient" and others saying "They do not feel that their lives should be dictated by government."

Parents believe TV ratings are largely on target. Even among parents who can recall instances of inaccurate ratings, favorability remains high. Just 29% of parents can recall a time when they saw a show on television and thought the rating was clearly inaccurate and should have been rated differently, and only 14% of parents say they have frequently seen inaccurate ratings. The 29% of parents who feel they have seen a show with an inaccurate rating have largely positive views of the TV ratings system: 64% have a favorable image and 19% have an unfavorable image of it. Among the 14% who believe they frequently see inaccurate ratings, 59% have a favorable image of the TV ratings system.

2. Parents' awareness of and reaction to eight specific attributes about the TV ratings system are mostly favorable.

Parents have largely favorable reactions to many attributes of the TV ratings system, including:

- Providing information about content using letters D (for suggestive dialogue), L (for coarse language), S (for sexual situations) and V (for violence) (66% More favorable/8% Less favorable/26% No strong feelings);
- Providing guidance based on the age of the child (63% More favorable/5% Less favorable/32% No strong feelings);
- A special monitoring board responsible for oversight (50% More favorable/13% Less favorable/37% No strong feelings);
- Advertisements for TV programs (i.e. "promos") displaying parental ratings (46% More favorable/13% Less favorable/41% No strong feelings); and
- Broadcast and cable networks responsible for providing parental ratings for each show they produce (45% More favorable/ 13% Less favorable/37% No strong feelings).

A majority of parents have no strong feelings about there being no parental ratings on news programming (21% More favorable/26% Less favorable/53% No strong feelings) and no parental ratings on sports programming (20% More favorable/22% Less favorable/58% No strong feelings). On these attributes, reactions are balanced between more favorable and less favorable.

Only the attribute of no parental ratings on advertising elicits a large net "less favorable" reaction from parents (17% More favorable/42% Less favorable/41% no strong feelings).

3. Parents use the TV ratings system in age-appropriate ways as part of a parental "tool kit" for their children.

More than two-thirds of parents say they use the TV Ratings System. Usage is higher among parents with children under 10 in the household and drops off among parents with older teenagers.

Fully 95% of parents who use the ratings most often find them helpful, as do 85% of parents of children ages 2-10. About three quarters of parents of teens and 72% of parents with 16-17 year old children find the ratings helpful.

4. The survey provides no indication that certain segments of the population are “left behind” in the world of TV ratings.

In fact, the data suggest that Latino and African American parents are actually more likely to use TV ratings and find them helpful.

	Parent Ethnicity		
	White	African American	Latino
% Believe Ratings are Helpful	77%	91%	84%
% Use Parental Ratings Often or Sometimes	66%	77%	72%

And, the same is true of parents with lower levels of formal education.

	Parent Education Level	
	High School or Less	Post-Grad
% Believe Ratings are Helpful	82%	69%
% Use Parental Ratings Often or Sometimes	69%	55%

5. Most parents are aware of the parental controls available.

More than two thirds (67%) of parents are aware their cable or satellite service provides parental controls and roughly a third (32%) are aware their TV has a V-chip. While some parents are aware of both, 75% of all surveyed parents are either aware of parental controls provided through their cable or satellite provider or aware their TV has a V-chip.

6. Parents who utilize parental control devices have highly favorable opinions of TV ratings.

More than one in three (36%) parents uses either a V-Chip or cable or satellite provided parental controls. And they are quite different from parents overall when it comes to their attitudes about TV ratings. Parents that use parental controls are notably more likely to use the TV ratings system, are more likely to report the ratings are helpful, have significantly higher favorable images of TV ratings, and are more likely to base household rules on the TV ratings system.

	Among Parents	
	Total	Use V-Chip or Cable/ Satellite Controls
Favorable image of TV ratings	69%	81%
TV ratings are helpful	80%	88%
Have rules based on TV ratings	28%	44%
Use TV ratings often	26%	43%

7. Most parents not using parental control devices say they don't use them because of the more hands-on role they assume with respect to their children's television-watching behaviors.

Roughly seven out of ten parents say they do not use the V-Chip or cable or satellite parental controls because an adult is nearby when their child is watching TV. More than four in ten say they do not use these devices because they have household rules in place about what their children can watch on TV.

8. Household "rules" for TV viewing are based on the age of the child, and reflect thoughtful judgments by parents.

Most parents surveyed (72%) report having rules about TV use. More than 80% of parents with 6-12 year olds in the house report having rules about TV use but there is a tapering-off in later teen years, with just 62% of parents with 16-17 year old children who report having TV rules.

When asked to identify the rules in their households with regards to TV viewing, parents report the rules for the youngest children have more to do with type of programming, while balancing television with other responsibilities takes precedence when children are older.

And, when teens are asked about the rules in their households, younger teens report more stringent rules than do older teens. Indeed, teens report a lessening of rules as they have gotten older. About a third (32%) of teens report only being allowed to watch TV shows based on parental ratings, but over half (52%) of these teens report this rule applied to them when they were 8-12 years old.

9. Roughly six out of ten teens report getting TV content using other devices.

Overall 61% of teens report watching TV on a device other than a TV. Primarily, teens are accessing TV content using laptops, desktops, and console video game players like the Xbox and PlayStation.

10. Parents and teens say there are many things that make life more difficult today. TV is not high on the list.

Teens say that television has less influence on their lives than parents believe it does. Just seven percent (7%) of teens report TV shows have “a lot” of influence on their behavior and the things they do, while 30% of all parents and 27% of parents of teens feel TV shows have “a lot” of influence on their children.

Parents and teens agree that technology has both good and bad effects, more kids are being bullied (a problem that is made more pervasive because of technology), the world is a scary and uncertain place, and the economy has forced many to struggle.

However, of all the potential influences on kids today, none are as important as their relationships, especially with parents. Among all parents, more than seven out of 10 say they have “a lot” of influence over their children’s behavior. More than two thirds (64%) of parents of teens say they do and roughly the same percentage (62%) of teens agree that their parents have “a lot” of influence over their behavior and the things they do.