



Confronting myth & marginalization

Asian American audiences
and on-screen representation



Diverse Intelligence Series • May 2022

We must continue to hold ourselves accountable for the stories that are told about Asian Americans and for proper representation on screens.

Foreword

Today, cultural dichotomy means more than just differences in traditions or recipes. In the last two years Asian American, Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander (AANHPI) communities in the U.S. have experienced triumph and trauma. From business leaders to battered victims, successful students to spa workers, tech success stories to terrified parents—these have been the experiences of many Asians in the U.S. over the last few years, but all too often the media focuses on the stories of trauma. Anti-Asian crimes continue to make headlines this year with new incidents across the U.S. When the focus of the news is on violence against people like me, it takes its toll.

For us in the Asian American community, being seen when we tune into our favorite media helps us feel more connected and empowered. Fortunately, today's media environment provides more options and access to content from around the world that resonates with AANHPI communities in the U.S.

But is there a connection between anti-Asian sentiment and the stereotypes that are reinforced by the way Asian Americans are portrayed on screen—often as either victims of violence, the model minority or in submissive roles? The media industry has pledged to do its part to invest in content that paints more accurate representations of diverse communities. When it comes to Asian representation, have we made any progress?

The media industry has tremendous influence on people's beliefs and biases. We must continue to hold ourselves accountable for the stories that are told about Asian Americans and for proper representation on screens. Whether you're an advertiser, agency, media supplier, creator or ally, we hope you'll use the insights in this report to find opportunities to break bias and also connect with our community.



Patricia Ratulangi
VP, Global Communications
Diversity, Equity & Inclusion

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Editor’s Note

For the purpose of this report, Asian American is defined to include all who identify on the U.S. Census as Asian, Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander, whether alone or in combination with some other race. Also, in this report, Asian American is only hyphenated when it is used as a compound adjective preceding a noun; Asian Americans, as a noun phrase, is not hyphenated.

Nielsen Measurements: As noted in the methodology section of this report, the sample design of our research is not managed in Asian languages; however, as a result of our efforts to accommodate non-English-speaking respondents, our panelists include English- and non-English-speaking populations.



More than a headline: increased Asian American representation on screen

Looking at the shows that are most watched by all U.S. audiences, we asked, “Are Asians present and what themes are present in those shows?” Since 2020, there has been an improvement in the overall representation of Asian Americans cast in America’s most-watched shows. According to Nielsen Gracenote Inclusion Analytics data, in 2021, half of the top 10 programs on broadcast and cable (which account for about **two-thirds** of all viewing) watched by U.S. audiences had Asian talent representation. In 2020, the top 10 most-watched shows had zero Asian representation.

In these top 10 most-viewed broadcast and cable programs, Asian women are driving the growth in Asian representation. This Asian female representation is most present in content that features police procedurals or action dramas, unfortunately leaving Asian male representation lacking in content featuring action and legal decision making.

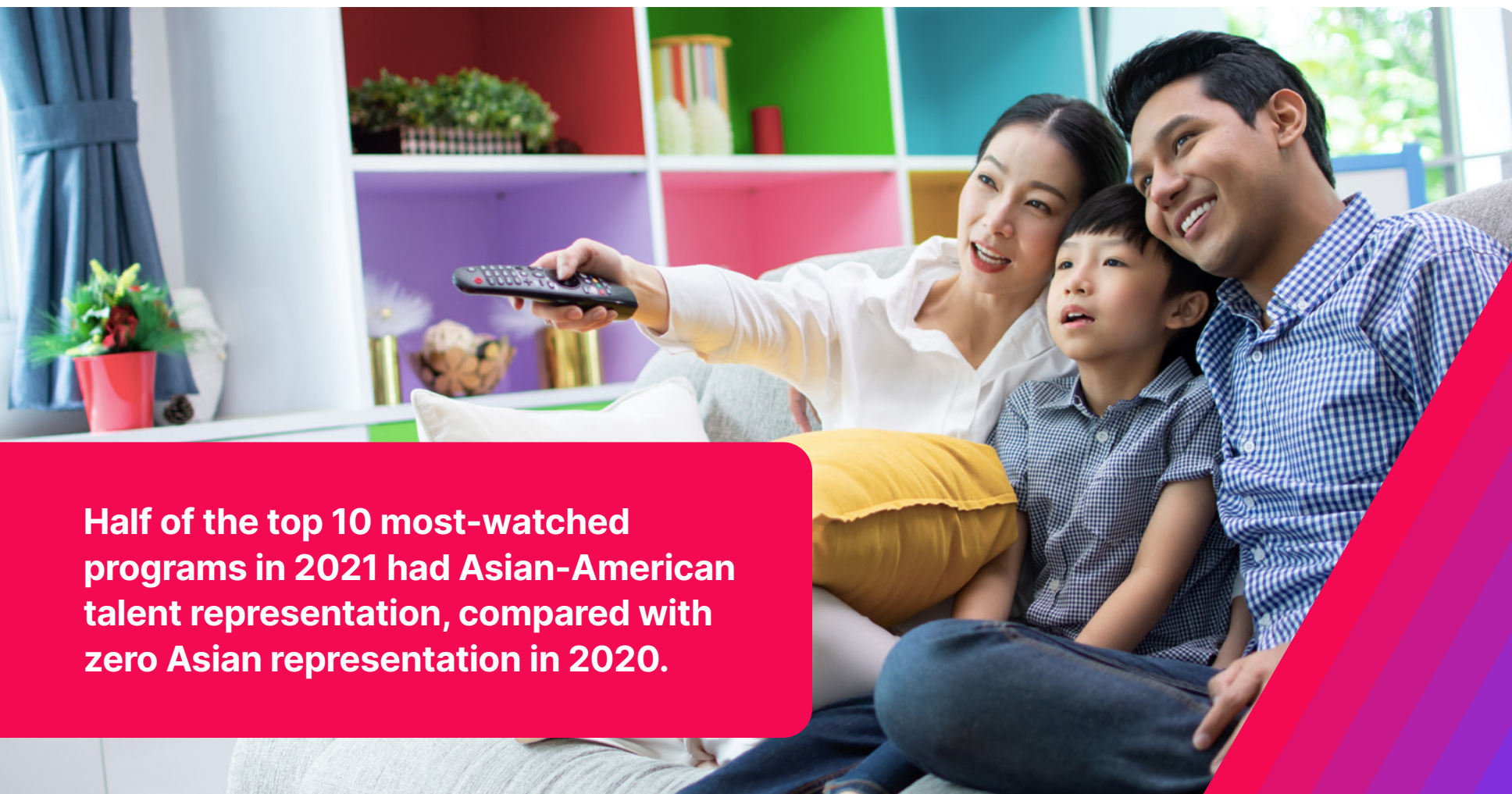
Taking a closer look, where Asian men are present in two of the top 10 programs, they play what have been referred to as “**model minority**” roles. In “Chicago Med”, Brian Tee plays Dr. Ethan Choi, emergency room physician and infectious disease specialist, and in “FBI”, James Chen plays Ian Lim, an intelligence analyst.

Asian women led representation in the top 10 most-watched linear programs 2021



Program	Total Asian share of screen	Asian women	Asian men
“NCIS”	5.8%	5.8%	0.0%
“Equalizer”	12.9%	12.9%	0.0%
“Yellowstone”	10.1%	10.1%	0.0%
“FBI”	16.8%	10.0%	6.8%
“Chicago Fire”	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
“Blue Bloods”	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
“60 Minutes”	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
“Chicago PD”	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
“Chicago Med”	11.4%	0.0%	11.4%
“Young Sheldon”	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%

Source: Nielsen NPOWER 2021 broadcast and cable program ratings (000), excluding sports and specials; Gracenote Inclusion Analytics, 2021

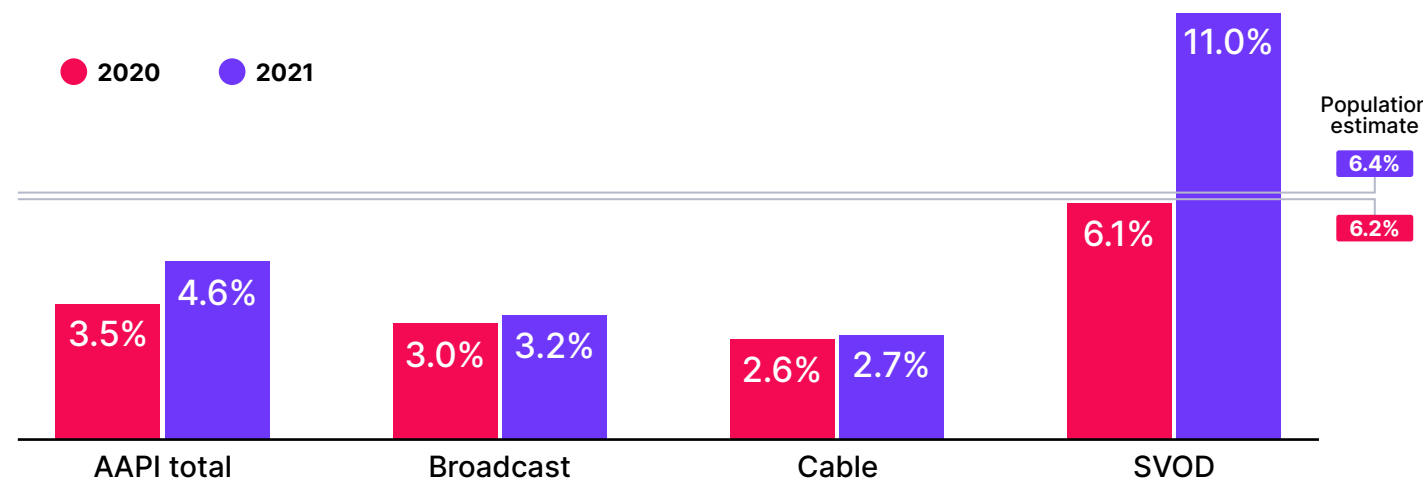


Half of the top 10 most-watched programs in 2021 had Asian-American talent representation, compared with zero Asian representation in 2020.



Evaluating Asian representation overall in the top 1500 TV programs, we see that there has been a marked improvement over the past two years. Streaming video on demand (SVOD) is leading the way, with almost double the representation of Asians between 2020 and 2021. In 2021 alone, AANHPI representation on streaming is more than double that of broadcast or cable. With people in the U.S. watching [nearly 15 million years](#) worth of streaming video content in 2021 alone, this also opens new opportunities for *all* audiences to engage with TV programs that include Asians.

AANHPI share of screen



Source: Gracenote Inclusion Analytics, 2021

Representation for the other Asian identity groups is also highest in SVOD, which provides more choices for culturally relevant content. Shows featuring Asian actors and storylines like *Red Notice* with South Asian actress Ritu Arya, “Shang-Chi and The Legend of the 10 Rings”, and “Raya and the Last Dragon” were among the top 10 streamed programs watched by Asian Americans last year.

AANHPI total TV Share of screen ranking by platform

	Total	Broadcast	Cable	SVOD
Asian & Pacific Islander	4.6%	3.2%	2.7%	11.0%
East Asian	2.7%	2.1%	1.7%	5.5%
South Asian	0.9%	0.5%	0.7%	2.2%
Southeast Asian	0.5%	0.5%	0.3%	0.8%
Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander	0.2%	0.2%	0.0%	0.5%

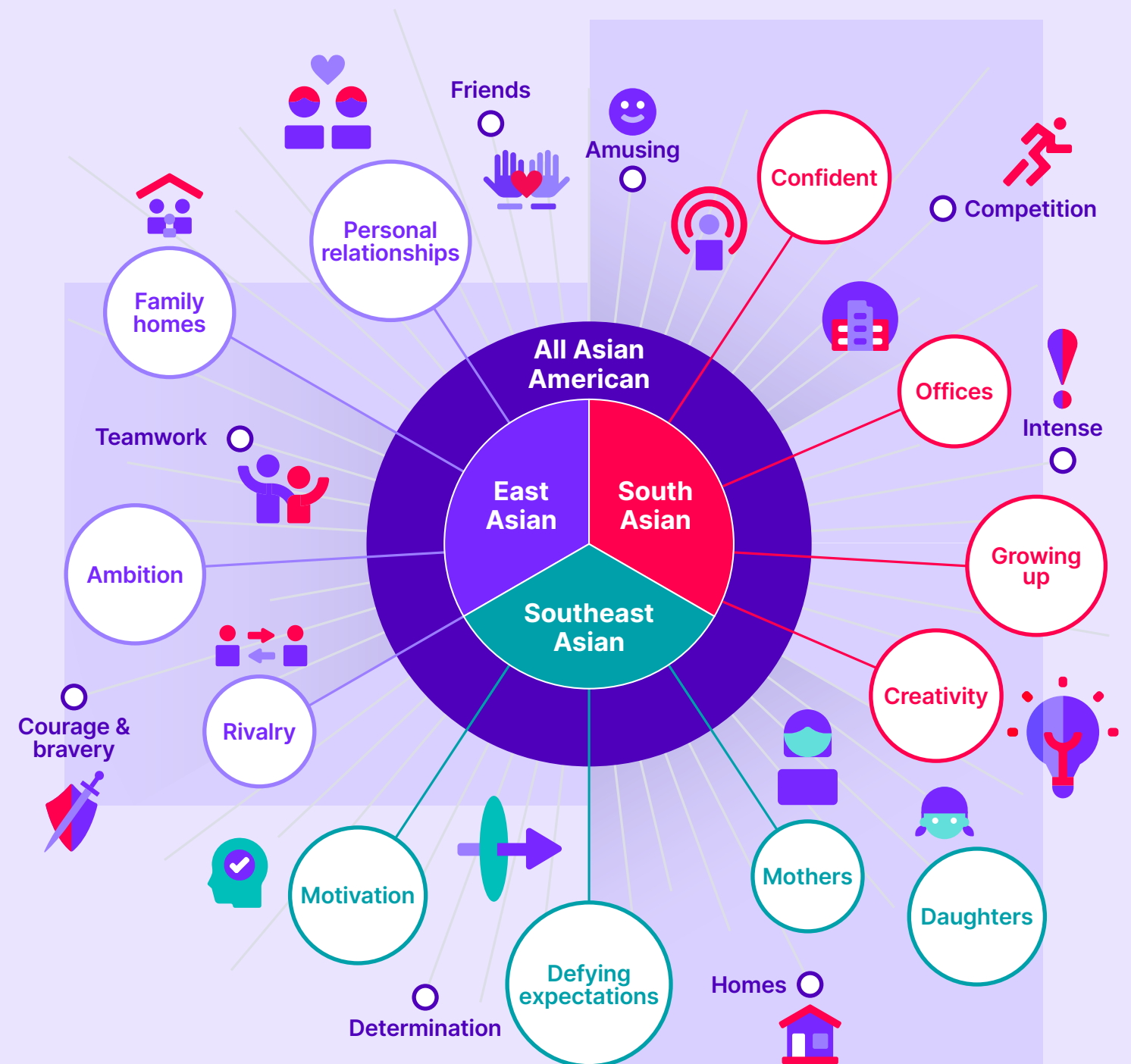
Source: Gracenote Inclusion Analytics, 2021

But just being present on screen isn't enough. The stories that are told and the roles played by Asians are also critical to shaping people's perceptions about the Asian American community. In 2020, the dominant themes in the stories when Asians were present were cerebral, thoughtful and good, which reinforced the model minority myth. In 2021, there is a greater diversity of thematic attributes such as *friends*, *teamwork* and *creativity*.

Top streaming show "Squid Game" brought to life the complexity of human connection in the teams that developed in the story to secure their survival. In another top show, "Never Have I Ever", Devi Vishwakumar, the protagonist, navigates life as a first-generation Indian American teenage girl. These shows and their stories featuring AANHPI people demonstrate expanded themes that are attractive and relatable to all audiences.



Top themes present in content featuring Asian Americans



Note: The number of shows with Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander representation was too low to include in this analysis.
Source: Gracenote Inclusion Analytics 2021

The genres where Asians are seen can also break or reinforce the perceptions about the community. Asians are most frequently seen in science fiction, and least seen in romance and entertainment. Asians are more than scientists or futurists; our community wants our authentic stories reflected in genres such as romance, entertainment and drama too. Across all genres, we see that East Asians are best represented, while Southeast Asians are seen the least. Compared to Bollywood or the Hong Kong and Chinese film industries, where the talent and shows are often imported into the U.S., Southeast Asia does not have a regional center for entertainment production. This is an opportunity for content creators and publishers to open doors to Southeast Asian talent and build a talent pipeline for Hollywood.

Closing the gap in representation

While there has been progress in the quantity and quality of Asian American representation, media content still falls short in meeting the demands of Asian American audiences who want more accurate portrayals. The results of a recent Nielsen Attitudes on Representation on TV Survey found that the majority of Asian Americans feel there is not enough representation of their identity group on TV, and when they are seen on screen, they feel the portrayal is inaccurate.

 2/3

of Asians feel there is **not enough representation on TV**

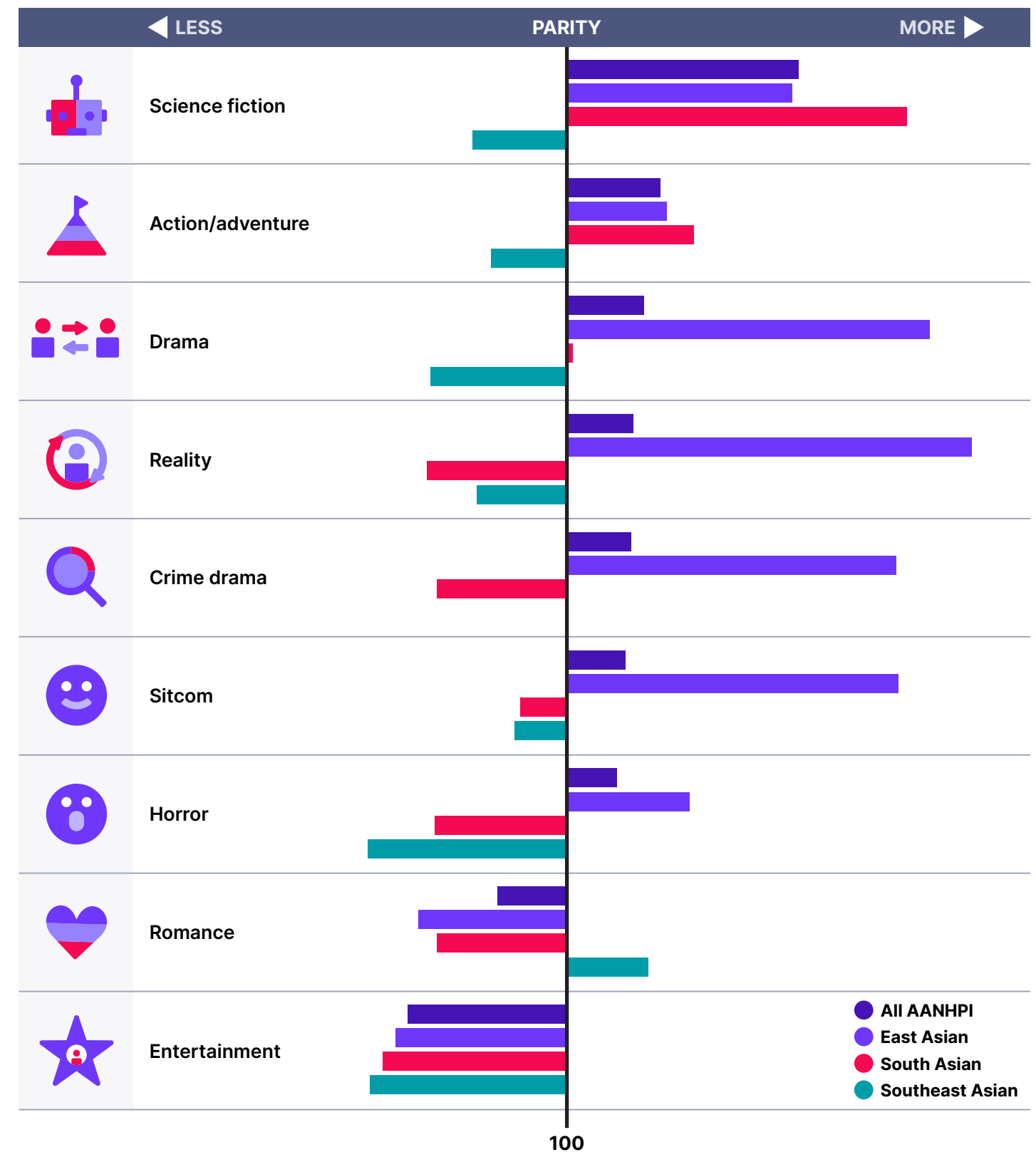
 >1/2

of Asians feel that the **portrayal is inaccurate**

Source: Nielsen Attitudes on Representation on TV Survey, May 2021



Asian American inclusion by genre



Read as: In the science fiction genre, all Asian groups are highly represented, except for Southeast Asians.

Source: Gracenote Inclusion Analytics, 2021



Getting content right means connecting with a powerful consumer group



\$1.3
TRILLION in buying power



+39%
POPULATION GROWTH
in the last 10 years



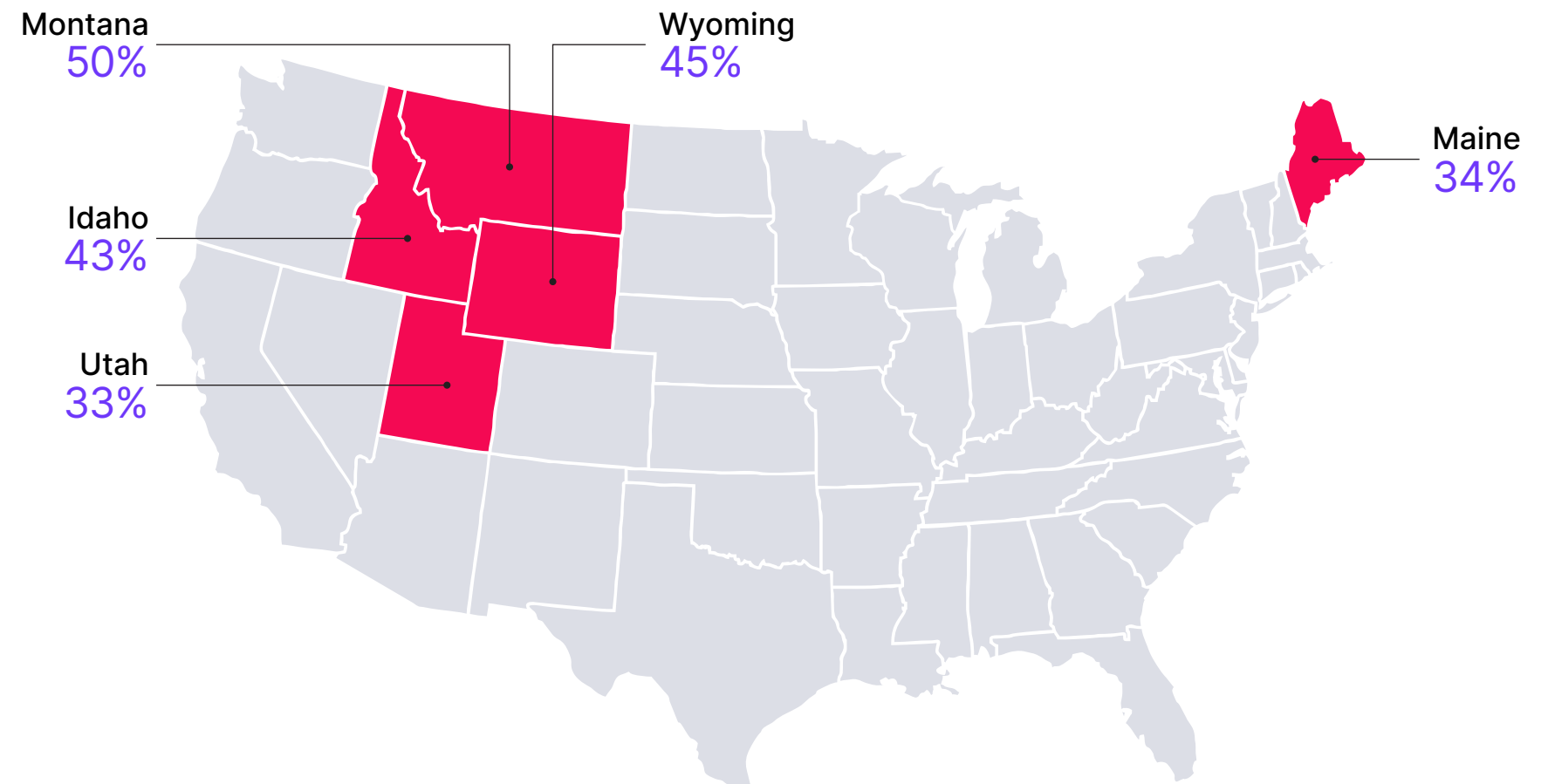
2.1
TRILLION MINUTES
of viewing power in 2021

Sources: Selig Center for Economic Growth 2020; 2020 U.S. Census Bureau; Nielsen Media Impact viewing minutes 2021

Part of the challenge for content that misses the mark on Asian representation is the ever-increasing diversity within the Asian American population—as more cultures and more mixed-race people whose identities are evolving. While the usual urban centers in California, New York, Washington and Illinois still have the largest number of Asian Americans in the country, there are new areas experiencing faster growth rates of mixed-race Asians. The answer to the question “What’s your culture?” is no longer a one-word answer but a tapestry of identities.

States with fastest growth in mixed-race Asians

Growth % 2010-2020 AAPI alone or in combination with another race



Source: 2020 U.S. Census

This increasingly diverse Asian community want to feel seen, and gravitating to culturally relevant content as rich as their own experiences, on platforms that offer the most choices. Without any AAPI writers credited among the most-watched broadcast and cable shows*, Asian audiences continue to search for content that resonates from other sources.

*Source: Gracenote Studio System, 2021



Streaming offers culturally relevant content

For many multigenerational households, culturally relevant content offers an added benefit: a space where the younger generation can connect with the older generation. In fact, Gen Z and Millennials in Asian households are more likely to watch Disney+ and Netflix with household members who are 65+:



13.5% of Asian American Disney+ viewers aged 18-24 viewed with a person 65-74—nearly 8x more than Disney+ audiences overall.



8.4% of Asian American Netflix viewers aged 18-24 watched with someone aged 65-74. Co-viewing between these two age groups on Netflix was 4.3x higher than audiences overall.

Netflix streaming in Asian households between Gen Z and 75+ viewers is 4x higher than audiences overall

Source: Nielsen Streaming Content Ratings, Nielsen National TV Panel, U.S. Coviewing through Television, 3/7/2022-3/13/2022

SPOTLIGHT

“Turning Red”

Who doesn't like an animated movie that's funny, with great music and has a fluffy red panda? “Turning Red” brought all that and an engaging portrayal of life as an Asian tween, Meilin, and her relationships with friends and family. The family-friendly content drew viewers of all ages and was an opportunity for the older generation to talk about the traditions that may have been a way of life for them, but lost in the modern lifestyles of their ambicultural grandchildren. The movie was among the most-streamed titles in first-quarter 2022 and drew a multigenerational Asian audience far exceeding the average population. In Asian American households:

- ▶ Asian viewers aged 75+ streamed “Turning Red” with kids in the home at nearly **3X (2.78) the rate of viewers in the age group overall.**
- ▶ The week following its premiere, **1.5X the number of Asian American 65-74 year-olds watched** the show with kids in the home.

The show's narrative also focuses on the relationship between Meilin and her mother, plus Meilin and her best friends—contributing to representation of Asian females that is higher in SVOD compared to broadcast and cable.

More spend more impact: advertising in Asian-inclusive content

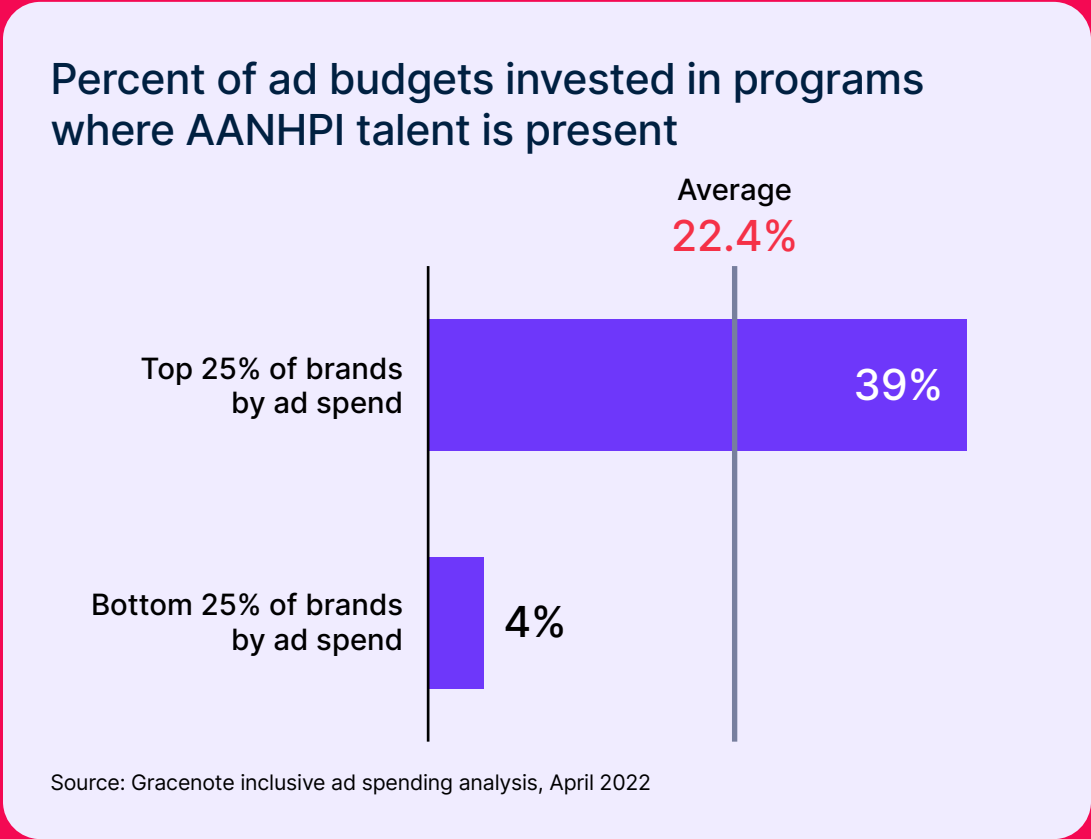
While Asian representation in TV content has improved, advertising in Asian-inclusive programs also has a role to play. There is an opportunity for brands to ensure that they are investing their advertising dollars in content where Asians are present.

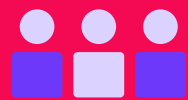
A quarter of brands are investing just 4% or less in the programs that represent Asian Americans at parity, while the leaders for Asian-inclusive ad spending invest almost 10x as much. Ad-supported content still makes up more than two-thirds of viewers' time with television. So the content that makes it to the screen frequently depends on its ability to attract ad dollars as well as audiences. Marketers can influence what is seen—not to mention who is seen and how they're portrayed—by investing in programs that are more inclusive.

It is, in fact, good for business, as Nielsen's Attitudes on Representation in TV study found that more than half of Asian American, Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander (AANHPI) consumers are more likely to engage with brands that advertise in programming that represents their own identities. Consumers are also expecting more from brands to advocate for causes that matter—brands that align themselves with Asian-inclusive programs are showing that they care about the AANHPI community.



Leading advertisers invest **39%** of their total ad budgets in Asian-inclusive content



65%  of Asians are more likely to watch content that features someone from their identity group.

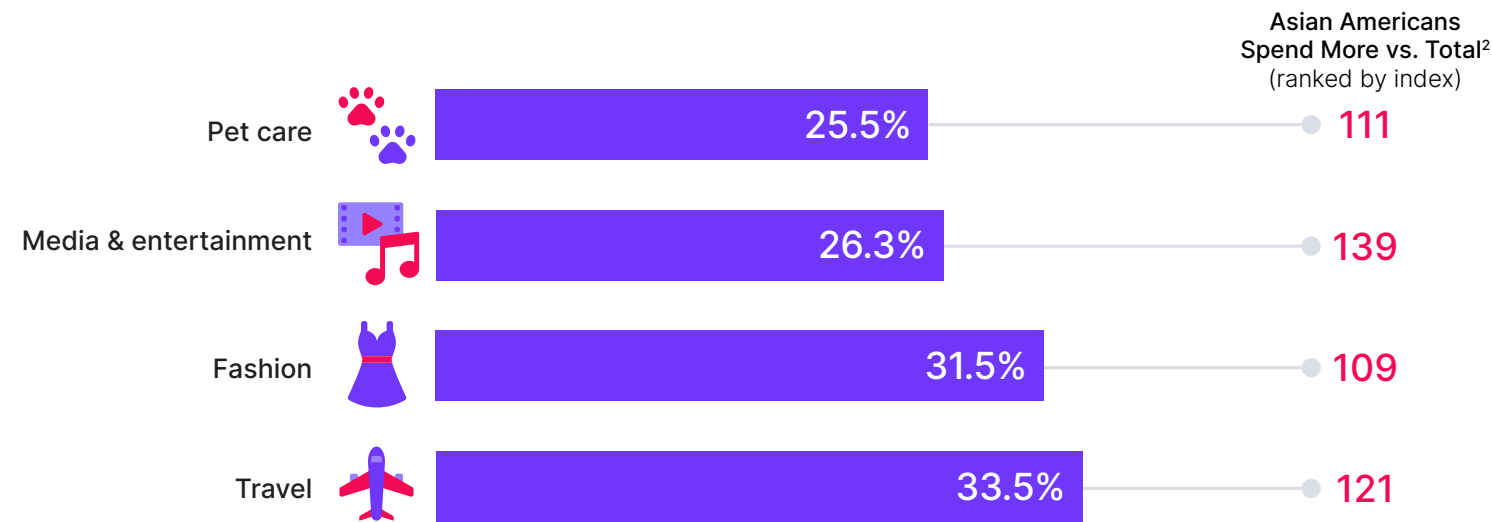
53%  of Asians are more likely to buy from a brand that advertises in content that features Asians.

Source: Nielsen Attitudes on Representation on TV Survey, May 2021

As AANHPI audiences are drawn to content that gets representation of their community right, brands that increase their advertising investment in such content stand a better chance of increasing their awareness within the community. While investment varies widely across ad categories, there are some missed opportunities. Increased investment in advertising is driving affinity for those categories in the Asian American community. And the reverse is true; where there is less investment there is less affinity.

For example, Asian Americans are spending more in travel, fashion, media entertainment and pet care—the same categories where brands are investing above-average ad dollars in Asian-inclusive content. Brands in those categories can differentiate themselves through advertising, reaching consumers who are already spending more, but may not already have an affinity for a particular brand.

Ad investment in Asian-inclusive programming by industry % inclusive ad spend¹



Asian Americans are spending more in travel, fashion, media entertainment and pet care—the same categories where brands are investing above-average ad dollars in Asian-inclusive content.

¹ Gracenote inclusive ad spending analysis, April 2022

² Nielsen Scarborough USA+ 2021 Release 2 Total (Jun 2020 - Nov 2021)

SPOTLIGHT

“The Cleaning Lady”

Brands can win with the dual impact of Asian-inclusive content and advertising. We see this with FOX’s series “The Cleaning Lady” about a struggling Filipino immigrant family and their involvement with organized crime, featuring a largely Southeast Asian cast. Almost 97% of the audience was from non-Asian households, creating the opportunity to increase empathy for and understanding of the Asian American experience. In addition, the opportunity to connect with Asian viewers who are watching it through video on demand or connected devices. In fact, “The Cleaning Lady’s” Asian viewers were 39% more likely to view on video on demand compared to audiences overall, providing brands additional avenue to interact with this segment.



Conclusion

How your brand is positioned compared to peers can be a point of pride for your social responsibility goals and another proof point of your brand's commitment to the AANHPI community. Tracking inclusive ad spend can also provide a roadmap for brands to improve their presence in content that complements their Asian-inclusive campaigns, because what gets measured gets managed.

We've also seen that Asian representation on screen is improving. As the AANHPI population grows, becoming more intersectional and ambicultural, how media and advertisers engage with this community has never been more important.

Showing up isn't enough anymore. The recent events around social justice brought more than a long-overdue dialog around equity. Consumers are realizing that they can demand more from the media they consume and the brands they buy from. As the fastest growing population, Asian Americans will continue to grow our influence. Today, we're seeing more programs with greater Asian representation both on- and off-screen, and the evolving themes that are breaking Asian American myths. The media industry has made progress in confronting the marginalization of Asian Americans, but we can't stop. In the future, we hope to see more integration of AANHPI cultures, more nuanced stories of our diverse experiences and a greater awareness that we are more alike than different.

Methodology

Television methodology

Television data is derived from Nielsen's National TV Panel that is based on a sample of over 41,000 homes that are selected based on area probability sampling.

Data used in this report is inclusive of multicultural audiences.

Digital methodology (computer, smartphone, tablet)

Digital data is based on Nielsen's Total Media Fusion, which is reflective of both panel and census measurement. It leverages the most granular and comprehensive cross-platform respondent-level data from our panels, along with census data from Nielsen's Total Audience Measurement solutions, to provide the highest quality, representative sample of digital media consumption. Data for this was sourced from Nielsen Media Impact (Nielsen's cross platform planning solution).

Television distribution status, device ownership

Based on scaled installed counts for 12/27/2021 - 03/27/2022 via Nielsen NPOWER/National Panel.

The Nielsen Attitudes on Representation on TV Survey

Survey of over 2,000 smartphone respondents via Nielsen's Computer and Mobile Panel, weighted for age, gender, race, ethnicity income and Android and iOS users conducted May 2021.

Nielsen Scarborough

Nielsen Scarborough USA+ 2021 Release 2 Total (Jun 2020 - Nov 2021). Scarborough measures the unique shopping patterns, product usage, demographics, lifestyles and cross-media behaviors of the American consumer at a local, regional or national level, giving the ability to profile over 2,000 measured categories and brands.

Nielsen NPOWER

NPOWER is the Nielsen Company's national custom analysis system, is a powerful tool that offers an unparalleled ability to focus on very specific audience characteristics and opens opportunities for detailed analysis of national television media. NPOWER employs a respondent-level data warehouse that subscribers access through a browser-based interface. Audience estimates can be generated, not only for all standard demographics and market breaks, but also for expanded audience characteristics that cannot be accessed anywhere else.

Nielsen Media Impact

For national planning, Nielsen Media Impact uses respondent-level data from Nielsen's Total Media Fusion, which includes TV, VOD, SVOD, digital, digital-place based, print, radio and cinema. For local planning, Local Nielsen Media Impact uses respondent-level data from Local Media Fusion, which includes TV and radio. NMI incorporates the most granular respondent-level data from measurement panels along with census calibration for the most comprehensive view of the media landscape.

Gracenote Inclusion Analytics

Designed to accelerate diversity and equity in media, Gracenote Inclusion Analytics illuminates representation of on-screen talent compared with audience diversity. The solution empowers content owners, distributors and brands to make better informed decisions around inclusive content investments. www.nielsen.com/inclusionanalytics

Gracenote Video Descriptors

Video Descriptors are a comprehensive set of descriptors bound by a unified hierarchical Video Descriptors Taxonomy. The descriptors are used to comprehensively describe a program across the various Video Descriptor Types like Theme, Character, etc. The data set is created by specially trained Gracenote editors using a rigorous tagging process to ensure a high-quality and consistent metadata product. Each video descriptor assigned to a program has a Video Descriptor Weight associated with it. The weights give the degree of importance of the descriptor for the program.

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About Nielsen

Nielsen shapes the world's media and content as a global leader in audience measurement, data and analytics.

Through our understanding of people and their behaviors across all channels and platforms, we empower our clients with independent and actionable intelligence so they can connect and engage with their audiences—now and into the future.

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