

Load shedding is killing prime time television

 By [Leslie Adams](#)

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It's almost 8pm on the worst Monday ever. You've had a long day but finally, the kids are tucked into bed and you're nestled up on the couch with a fun-size slab of chocolate ready to get your weekly *Generations: The Legacy fix*. But then suddenly

Lights cut out. The TV goes black. One of the kids has started yelling for their battery-powered night light. Load shedding again, you think, before silently cursing everyone from your children (probably not fair) to Eskom (fair).



Source: www.unsplash.com

This has become an all too familiar picture in South African households. There was a massive spike in load shedding last year: by the end of 2022, we saw a 200% year-on-year (YOY) increase from 2021.

The end of Prime Time

The result? It's wiping out television's Prime Time, as we know it. While it may come as a surprise to no one, the SABC's annual performance plan shows a direct link between increasing power outages and the decrease in the amount of time viewers spend watching TV.

The SABC is not alone in this. A few days ago, MultiChoice's shares dropped by 15% – a loss of almost R8bn in value – after it admitted that load shedding was impacting its South African margins.

At the end of June last year, South Africa saw load shedding starting to ramp up. The knock-on effect was that TV viewership sank dramatically; down 34% in the first week of July 2022, versus 2021.



South Africa primed for the Great Streaming Boom

Leslie Adams 27 Sep 2022



In August, South Africans had a brief respite and TV ratings once again picked up. However, this relief was short-lived, and in September 2022, the crisis deepened even further as Eskom's grid lost significant generating capacity, and SA rapidly skipped through load shedding levels 4 – 6.

By the end of September, the country had seen more darkness than in previous years combined, and this was evident in the steep 17% decline in television ratings from the previous month.

This year, we know that things will only get worse from a load shedding point of view before they get better, and this will naturally have an impact on television viewership.

But that doesn't mean people have or will stop indulging in their favourite shows – far from it. While broadcasters are bearing the brunt of loadshedding – evident in their annual results – streaming or video on demand (VOD) services, on the other hand, are on the rise.

Despite load shedding, streaming continues to grow

The rise in load shedding is happening in parallel to a proliferation of VOD platforms. We've seen new players enter the local market such as Disney+ while well-established platforms locally, such as Showmax and Viu, continue to show positive growth.

Take South Africa's largest streaming platform, Viu, for example. Viu reported a 2% increase in cumulative downloads between August to September 2022 (from 5,307,688 – 5,416,177) and a 5% growth in app downloads.

While this might seem small, bear in mind the decline that TV viewership saw in that same period, highlights. Any growth, given the context, is significant.

Reasons for the growth in VOD

A key reason for this growth is the fact that when load shedding strikes, consumers simply access their favourite shows across other devices, such as their laptops and mobile phones. All they need is mobile data or a secure internet connection and they can watch *Skeem Saam* to their hearts' content.

But that's only one part of the equation. The move away from 'appointment viewing' (watching content at a specific time on a specific day) to 'content on demand' is another contributor. This fundamental shift in user behaviour was catalysed by Covid-19.

This was evidenced in reports from South Africa's national broadcaster, the SABC, which said: "In April 2020, when the country was just a few days into the hard lockdown, (the) Independent Communications Authority South Africa (ICASA) issued mobile operators with temporary licences for unused radio frequency spectrum, in order to ease network congestion. This meant that operators could offer their customers cheaper data. Even though this temporary arrangement ended 17 months later (in November 2021), South Africans had adopted data-enabling behaviours that are certain to

remain.”

Finally, many streaming services have introduced viewing on same day as live – or ‘VOSDAL’ – as ‘un-catchy’ an anagram as that may be, so you don’t have to wait a few days or weeks before your favourite shows are loaded.

While load shedding will be with us for some time, the actual consumption of broadcast content is not going anywhere – we’re simply changing how we view.

I see this as less about TV vs. VOD or the distribution channel of the content, but rather about ensuring that we get the content we need, so that when the lights go out, South Africans don’t need to add missing the latest episode of Generations to their load shedding woes.

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