Research shows plasma trumps LCD in consumer preference

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Seeing is believing: Consumers significantly prefer plasma TVs after viewing in home conditions

LONDON â€" Consumers have a clear preference for plasma display screens (PDP) over liquid crystal displays (LCD), findings from a recent survey show.

The study, conducted by global market research company, Synovate, is the first ever European research into consumer preferences in medium to large-screen television sets.

The margin was almost two to one in favour of plasma screens, with 73 per cent of respondents who viewed a side by side comparison rating plasmas as providing the 'best image quality' ahead of LCD (27 per cent).

The Synovate study, conducted this summer in the UK, France and Germany, asked consumers which screen provided the best overall image quality for the following criteria: sharpness, colour, response speed, contrast, black quality and resolution. The study was commissioned by Panasonic and Pioneer.

Plasma takes the lead

The results reveal a clear favour for plasma. Sixty-one per cent of consumers felt plasma screens provided the best sharpness experience, compared to 21 per cent who preferred LCD.

When it came to consumer perception of colour, response speed and contrast, 65 per cent of consumers deemed plasma screens to have the best colour quality compared to 24 per cent who favoured LCD.

Similarly, plasma screens were voted as providing the best quality for response speed by 62 per cent of consumers, with LCD scoring 15 per cent. Nearly a quarter of respondents believed both technologies provided a similar performance.

Plasma screens once again lead the way with contrast quality. Sixty-one per cent of consumers tested believed plasma had the best contrast performance, compared to 26 per cent for LCD.

The reproduction of black is of pivotal importance to the overall viewing experience. Before seeing the video sequence, plasma was deemed to have a slight lead (37 per cent to 30 per cent for LCD), while a third of people felt that both formats provide similar black performance. After seeing the comparison, the majority of people who felt that the 'best black quality' is created by plasma shot up to 72 per cent.

"We've been watching the television market for some time and there is no doubt that buying a new TV is a confusing decision for consumers," says Yves Robeet, Research Director, Synovate. "This is partially due to the arrival of new broadcast technologies like HD and digital as well as the heavy promotion of LCD and plasma by manufacturers and the ongoing technical debate between media and analysts about which is the best technology. This research is designed to make the process much easier by asking consumers what they think."

How did we do it?

Synovate canvassed 603 consumers and executed the study under certified home viewing conditions. Two groups were established. The first, with no prior knowledge of plasma and LCD, were simply asked to express their preferences after watching a 90 second video sequence played side by side on LCD and plasma displays (with their brand names covered) in three presentation suites. All respondents rated the experience using TVs in the 37-inch (XGA PDP and XGA LCD), 42-inch (XGA PDP and 1080p LCD) and 50-inch categories (both 1080p).

The second group, who claimed to have knowledge of plasma and LCD, were asked before the comparison to reveal which format they believed provided the 'best overall quality' and to reveal their initial preferences for plasma or LCD in several feature categories, including resolution, image depth, colour and black tone. These benchmarks were used to track changes in perceptions after the video sequence had been viewed.

Initially, no preference was expressed in either Germany or the UK for overall image quality though French respondents expressed a preference for plasma.

After watching the content, however, the whole group was asked the same question. Sentiment swung sharply in favour of plasma: 73 per cent of people rated plasma as the superior performer in image quality compared to 27 per cent for LCD.

Robeet comments, "The research replicated the typical viewing conditions found in the home and produced very clear results. This suggests that retailers might consider researching the conditions in which customers watch their TVs to provide a similar environment in-store to compare performance in a life-like situation; after all, the viewing environment and the type of content people watch should dictate model choice more than any other factor."

Test conditions

Synovate set up identical tests in London, Paris and Cologne to measure consumer television viewing preferences. The comparison suites were set up to replicate typical viewing conditions: the screens were viewed from two to three metres, from a point at the centre of the two TVs in each room while the maximum light intensity was 50lux. Viewing conditions were certified by an external consultant. Respondents were asked about their viewing environments at home and 75 per cent of respondents agreed that the conditions were identical or very similar to their home environments.

The interviews, performed in central locations in each city, were almost equally spread between male and female and almost equally split between the 18 to 44 and 45 to 65 age groups. The plasma and LCD television sets used in the viewing tests were set up by Synovate technicians using the factory default settings. The brand names and any identifying styling were covered.

About Synovate

Synovate, the market research arm of Aegis Group plc, generates consumer insights that drive competitive marketing solutions. The network provides clients with cohesive global support and a comprehensive suite of research solutions. Synovate employs over 5,500 staff in 108 cities across 50 countries.

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