



Casual fling or committed relationship?

Measuring Reader Engagement

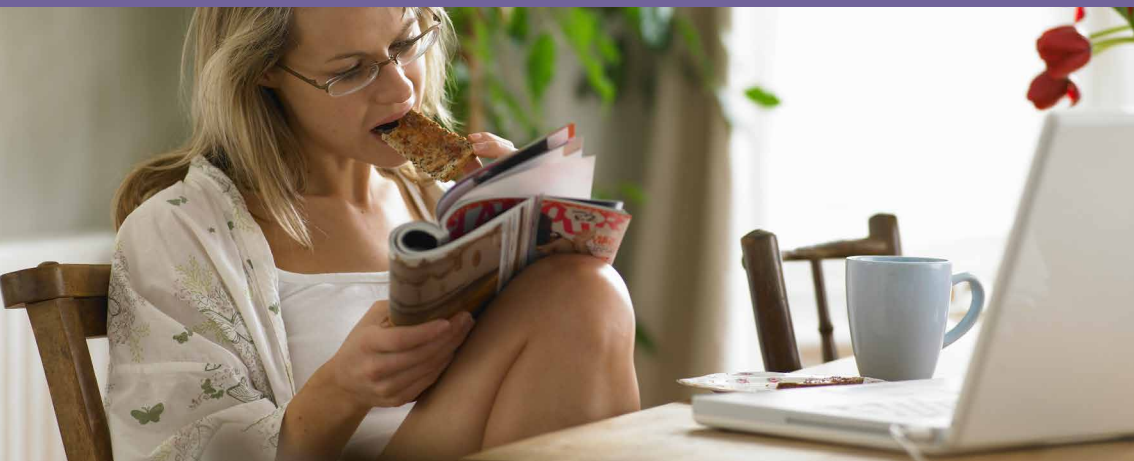
Bite Sized Thought Piece
2014

The growth of digital (particularly mobile) platforms means that people can now far more easily control the media content they consume, when they do it and where. This has led to an increase in consumption and to the emergence of both 'media meshing' and 'media stacking' as people juggle their lives to fit everything in. This leads us to the very real question of what effects different platforms and multi-tasking have on consumers' levels of engagement with both branded media content and the ads contained within.

There is no doubt that the way people read and experience content varies from platform to platform. Reading headlines on a phone while in the back of a cab on

the way to a meeting, browsing articles on a tablet at home or reading a printed copy of a newspaper on the train are all different experiences. The content may be the same, but it is likely to be read by people in different mindsets with different degrees of attention.

From an advertiser point of view, this can be important. How long are people's eyes focused on the content? Are they browsing or reading? Do they care about where their content is coming from, or will any source have equal value to them? Do they seek out particular branded content? Is it habitual or sporadic behaviour? Is advertising an obstacle to what they are reading or in harmony with





it? All of this can have an impact on the value offered to an advertiser – beyond simple head counts or page views.

It is certainly harder to 'read' and do other things at the same time. The very act of reading demands a certain level of engagement with the task at hand, demanding more focus and concentration than other types of media behaviour.

Readers have long had the ability to skip advertising in printed media, making it more a part of the fabric of the title than the interruptive model offered by television or radio. But will this remain the case when publisher branded content is read online? It is likely that the level

of people's engagement with what they are reading will have an impact on their propensity to notice the advertising. But can this be measured and quantified?

At the core of the engagement concept are behavioural factors like the amount of time spent reading and how loyal readers are to particular publisher brands. There are also emotional aspects to consider, such as people's motivations for reading (e.g. work or leisure) and their connection to the brands. Readership surveys around the world have taken different approaches to measuring engagement over the years, although it has not proven to be an exciting area for methodologists until recently.

In the UK, the National Readership Survey asks about Time Spent Reading and Source of Copy. In the past, more detailed studies of reader engagement have been attempted. The Quality of Reading Studies carried out in 1997/98 and in 1999/2000 went into far greater detail, asking questions about the number of times people picked up the issues they read, what proportion of a title they read and their attitudes to reading it. The studies were not, however, commercially successful in the market and have not been repeated.

Another approach is to use behavioural data collected in the main interview as a surrogate for engagement. This

idea has been used by a number of media agencies as a way to measure TV programme engagement – i.e. to combine two behavioural metrics straight from the peplemeter data: percentage of viewers who watched 3 or 4 out of the last 4 programmes combined with the percentage who watched a majority of the minutes in the last episode.

In a US study in 2000, Jon Swallen of Ogilvy & Mather showed there to be a strong positive correlation between this metric and advertising recall. Mindshare rejuvenated the idea a few years later and dubbed the measure 'purple ratings'.

In this case, reading frequency data could be used as a surrogate for



engagement on the basis that the most loyal readers are the most engaged readers. The benefit of this type of approach is that it does not add to the questionnaire length and can be applied to any publication covered in the study.

In Australia, Ipsos tested and implemented a range of more extensive reader engagement questions (EQ™). This followed a request from magazine and newspaper publishers for a richer, deeper metric to help in marketing ad space.

Broadly speaking, we asked questions which addressed five key ‘axes’ of engagement including: Source of Copy, Proportion Read, Motivation for Reading, Connection with the title and Actions

taken. Slightly different questions are asked for newspapers and magazines. The engagement questions were included in the survey for two years and have now been displaced by other questions (as the data were quite stable). Thirty individual questions were asked. Our experience with this rather lengthy list of questions was that respondents can tire if asked too many. So it is important to get the right balance between asking what we need to ask and respondent willingness to answer.

In our advertising research practice, Ipsos asks a single question about people’s perceived ‘closeness’ to a brand (with respondents invited to answer on a sliding scale from ‘Very Close’ to

SOURCE	LOYALTY	MOTIVATION	CONNECTION	ACTION
Delivered	¼	Survival	Trust	Interact
Newsstand	¼ - ½	Passion	Inspire	Share
Some other way	½ - ¾	Escape	Entertain	Shop
Someone else	Cover-to-cover	Discovery	Enrich	Save



'Not Close'). Data show – for a range of consumer goods – that closeness correlates well with brand usage, brand loyalty and purchase intent, as we would expect. A modified version of this single question could prove useful in assessing the strength of publisher brands, as it is in other consumer categories.

Ipsos measures readership – and advertising effectiveness - in some seventy countries around the world.

Our experience in developing in-depth reader engagement metrics in the UK and elsewhere will be of use to all publishers, advertisers and agencies interested in gaining greater insight and value from their readers, beyond the standard measurement metrics. If you would like to know more, and to benefit from lessons already learnt, please use the contact details below.

For more information, please contact:

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