

Selling the D-word



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In support of the BRITDOC festival, part of the Channel 4 British Documentary Film Foundation, Ipsos MediaCT have undertaken primary research to investigate the perceptions of the documentary market in Great Britain and the opportunity beyond TV. The findings will support a master-class being held at the festival called "Selling the D-word".

A core theme running through the research is the strength of feeling towards TV documentaries, with high levels of regular viewing, positive association and likeability.

These regular viewers are fairly stereotypical, typically being middle aged, well educated, higher social class and broadsheet readers. This group is very supportive of the genre (on TV), perceiving that TV documentaries are getting better and actively willing to watch more if they were more relevant.

However, TV documentaries fail to engage the younger, less educated viewers who are more likely to perceive documentaries as boring and less important than fiction. There is a significant level of apathy towards documentaries with a large number of people unable to articulate what documentaries mean to them.

Furthermore, the findings highlighted how difficult it will be for documentaries to move beyond TV, with few actively viewing or interested in viewing documentaries at the cinema or on DVD.

Research highlights

- Nearly half of all GB adults regularly watch documentaries on TV. The viewer profile is similar to a TV drama/film viewer profile - reflecting the broad appeal that TV documentaries now have.

- There are considerably more positive than negative words associated with documentaries, with strong associations towards 'Interesting', 'Informative' and 'Educational'. However, there is an underlining apathy towards the genre, with 3 in 10 being unable to associate any words.
- 1 in 3 adults 'like' TV documentaries consistent with likeability of fictional TV drama/films. Amongst this core audience that 'like' documentaries, 50% agree that TV documentaries are getting better and given the right content, half agree that they would watch more documentaries on TV.
- 15% of adults state a 'dislike' for TV documentaries. There is also relatively high agreement in this group that documentaries are 'boring' at 28% (rising for those aged 15-17), and that they are 'less valuable than fiction' at 24%. For those that 'dislike' or 'don't watch' documentaries, few agree they should watch more at 4% and 11% respectively, highlighting the difficulty to convert this group into viewers.
- Few adults watch documentaries on DVD (10%) or at the cinema (4%), and both have high levels of general dislike for doing so, at 55% for DVD and 71% for cinema.

About the research:

The research was conducted using a face to face CAPI (computer aided) omnibus conducted in w/c 7th July 2008, with results based on a nationally representative sample of 1000 adults (15+ yrs) in Great Britain.

For more information, please contact:

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