

Chapter 6

Evolving Media Metrics from Assumed Attention to Earned Engagement

Martha G. Russell
Stanford University, USA

ABSTRACT

This chapter stems from recent discussions with academic, advertising and channel researchers.¹ In this review, four types of issues relevant to new agendas for advertising research are highlighted: the legacy of metrics based on the interrupted narrative model of advertising and assumed attention; real advertising campaigns as a source of innovations in developing new metrics for earned engagement; the interdisciplinary theoretical foundations for studying engagement and persuasion in advertising; and the need for advertisers, media developers and academicians to collaborate and expedite the creation of metrics to rationalize the monetization of new media used for advertising. Measuring engagement and persuasion in the current media ecology requires metrics that consider simultaneous media exposure and continuous partial attention in the context of a participatory culture and multifaceted objectives for advertising campaigns.

INTRODUCTION

New technologies, consumer control, media fragmentation, and business pressures are contributing to a media culture of continued partial attention (Brint, 2001). This trend has produced renewed interest in understanding the dynamics of engagement and using them to execute successful, persuasive advertising campaigns. The changes

produced by this trend have important implications for the questions, methods and metrics of advertising research.

The field of advertising has traditionally differentiated purchased media (space in the media is purchased by advertisers) and earned media (space in the media is acquired without payment through journalistic and public relations efforts.) In a like manner, a distinction can be made between assumed engagement, in which audience metrics count the number of people who could

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potentially pay attention to a message, and earned engagement, in which the audience engages with the message in a real or imagined way because the message is perceived to merit interaction.

Legacy audience media metrics, such as CPM (cost per thousand), CPP (cost per person), and CPI (cost per insertion), arose from the desire of channel developers, advertisers and their clients to quantify cost/benefit of media purchases. When they were developed, these legacy metrics assumed that each media channel was delivered to its audiences (individuals, family, etc.) in a singular fashion. In recent years, the range of media that advertisers can purchase has expanded. The ability to personalize messages and integrate them across media is rapidly evolving. The participatory media culture has spread globally. In short, media and its use have changed. The old metrics—although widespread in their use—are simply not sufficient for today’s advertising delivery methods and the multi-tasking and multi-channel involvement taking place.

The evolution of those metrics has already begun. The traditional language of measured media measurement is being expanded with new metrics—POI (point of influence), POP (point of purchase), POC (point of consumption), buzz, and social channel indicators. Some of these are experimental; some are becoming accepted; others have yet to be invented and defined. The hope of advertisers and their clients, channel developers and researchers is that new metrics will provide actionable measures of the impact by persuasive messages on intended attitude and behavioral changes. With valid and actionable metrics, new media channels can be appropriately priced and advertisers will have a rational basis for recommending advertising strategies and media buys for their clients.

The vested interests of advertisers, their clients, channel developers, and academic researchers are somewhat different, yet all may benefit from valid and actionable new metrics. Academicians are exploring new constructs that help to explain

engagement and persuasion processes in the context of continuous partial attention and a participatory media culture. Channel developers are looking for pricing models that reflect the value of audience engagement they can deliver. The agency business is in the midst of an urgent shift to realign with the cultural and business environments. With limited time available for research and reflection, practitioners make generalizations based on anecdotal evidence.

Establishing new metrics requires time and involves intellectual and operational challenges. The process is multidimensional and complex. Collaboration across these different perspectives is required if the new metrics are to be relevant across the industry.

In this time of change, collaboration among practitioners, channel and technology developers and academicians is urgently needed to accelerate the co-creation and migration of metrics from a model that assumes the engagement of an individual in an interrupted narrative to a model of earned engagement in an always-on, multi-tasking environment. In this collaboration, academicians can leverage case studies of real advertising campaigns to generate new, testable hypotheses. Practitioners can deploy academic insights to shortcut trial and error processes as they design and implement campaigns.

EVOLVING MEDIA USE AS CONTEXT

For several decades, broadcast advertising and media metrics have been based on the interrupt model of traditional narrative media, in which advertisements—persuasive messages that were intended to inform and persuade—interrupted the audiences who were engaged in the broadcast narrative. When there were only a handful of broadcast channels—e.g., radio in ‘30s and ‘40—writers initially wrote those shows (such as *Fibber Magee and Molly*) in order to give their sponsors an opportunity to promote their products. Writers

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