

Television Audience Measurement is a misnomer, wasting billions.

Man has walked on the moon. Laser surgery is performing miracles every day. A man called Barack Hussein Obama will soon be president of the United States. The world's largest Islamic population is a thriving democracy today. But the business of buying and selling television airtime in Indonesia is stuck in a time warp, still talking an old language without considering supplementary tools available to industry at large. The exceptions of course are the smart media agencies who know better.

A simple analogy illustrates the appalling wastage of advertising budgets by those who ignore viewer involvement data available from Roy Morgan Single Source. With 27,000 respondents from the big cities, towns and villages around Indonesia, a more accurate and statistically reliable portrayal of television viewership is simply not available on a quarterly basis. Television audience measurement or TAM as it is popularly called has a particularly useful function on a daily basis, informing interested parties how many eyeballs watched which program. But there its usefulness ends, incapable as it is to go beyond demographic definitions of target audiences. It is a shotgun, enabling the user to fire multiple pellets together in the hope that one will hit the real target.

To continue the analogy, a sniper's rifle does a much better job of actually hitting the target without collateral damage. Or wasted advertising rupiahs, in this context. If the intended target is "people intending to buy a new motorcycle", then simple demographics have little ability to define the target. Before Roy Morgan Single Source was launched in October 2004, the popular view was that men chose the brand of new motorcycles, simply because all the paperwork showed that almost all the vehicles were owned by men.

VIEWER INVOLVEMENT WITH TOP10 NEWS PROGRAMS						
TOP NEWS PROGRAMS	RATINGS		Really Love to Watch	Especially Choose to Watch	Watch Because Household Member Wishes To	Watch If There's Nothing Better
RCTI: Saputar Indonesia (Afternoon) (M-F)	6.6%	}	37.8%	45.2%	12.1%	7.7%
RCTI: Saputar Indonesia (Afternoon) (Sa,Su)	6.3%		35.4%	45.7%	12.6%	7.3%
RCTI: Buletin Sang (Sa,Su)	6.3%		17.9%	22.6%	11.2%	7.0%
SCTV: Liputan 6 Petang (Sa,Su)	5.7%		23.5%	34.2%	13.0%	6.3%
RCTI: Buletin Sang (M-F)	5.3%		20.4%	26.9%	11.0%	4.5%
SCTV: Liputan 6 Petang (M-F)	5.2%		29.2%	38.9%	12.6%	6.6%
SCTV: Liputan 6 Sang (Sa,Su)	4.4%		16.3%	24.6%	13.5%	6.4%
SCTV: Liputan 6 Sang (M-F)	3.7%		20.2%	31.0%	13.0%	5.8%
TRANS Reportase Sore (Afternoon) (Sa,Su)	3.6%		31.2%	38.2%	9.7%	10.0%
TRANS Reportase Sore (Afternoon) (M-F)	3.2%		31.7%	43.8%	12.9%	7.3%

Source: Roy Morgan Research, September 2008

In a society where most breadwinners are male, this is understandable. Yet, we now know that of the 7.9 million new motorcycle intenders, about 40 per cent of all choices will actually be made by women riders. Who “owns” the motorcycle on paper is irrelevant to the decision-making process. To target men as a demographic would be wasteful. To target men as well as women would be even more so. The only effort that’s worth making is to uncover who’s in the market for a new motorcycle, both men and women, then determine the appropriate media to reach them cost-effectively.

Television ranks as an important medium among this target universe, so it is critical to determine not only what they’re watching, but which ones they “really love to watch” or “especially choose to watch”. It is logical to assume that advertising that appears in a warm and friendly context has greater influence than those that appear in a dull and dreary one. There’s enough research to prove that the power of women’s magazines work harder for women’s cosmetics than any other medium. Roy Morgan Single Source data on ratings compare with TAM data, but the involvement clearly illustrates that about 20 per cent of all the viewers watching the Top 10 news programs don’t really want to. What’s the value of their disinterested viewership? The same applies to every type of target consumer out there.

The fact that the country’s largest TV station nor the country’s largest media buyer use the involvement data is a serious indictment of the industry’s leaders, not the industry as a whole. Regardless of big business being out of touch with the best available tools, smart media buyers are working with smart advertisers to change the language. Why use a shotgun when a sniper’s rifle is available? Perhaps because we instinctively want to let sleeping dogs lie. As an advertising agency man turned market researcher, I am convinced there is more inertia in the industry than there is among the public at large.

It is the same laziness that the Ministry of Information is now taking up cudgels against. Disturbed by what they deem as the declining quality of television content, they are determined to monitor the qualitative aspect of viewership, not just the quantity. Much discussion has been had recently between their representatives and those of major TV stations as well as the advertising industry. To all of them I say that the supplementary tool that does precisely that, quantitatively and qualitatively, already exists. Why invent an alternative from scratch and experiment with it for years while a proven measurement tool used by more marketers and media buyers is already capable of doing just that? If anything needs to be added, the machinery is already in place to accommodate those needs.

After all is said and done, the fact is that Roy Morgan Single Source measures society, products and consumers, media users and TV viewers, holistically. With over 25,000 Indonesian respondents annually, it is projected to reflect almost 90% of the population 14 years and older, both urban and rural. The reports are updated every 90 days. With broader support from the television industry, data can be produced monthly. That will only happen when and if there is a real desire to change the status quo, to honestly look at sharper tools that can cleverly supplement the old blunt one that has been around for years.

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