



How billions are wasted trying to “catch eyeballs”.

In Jakarta on one of my frequent visits, I was watching the televised match between Manchester United and Blackburn Rovers on Sunday with two good mates. My host is best described as a sports junkie, with strict rules of conduct. Cheering is allowed, but no idle chatter is tolerated when the ball is in play. Snacks can be eaten at any time, but drinks are best refilled in the commercial break. Nobody is permitted to touch the remote, or contemplate changing the channel even while the ads are on.

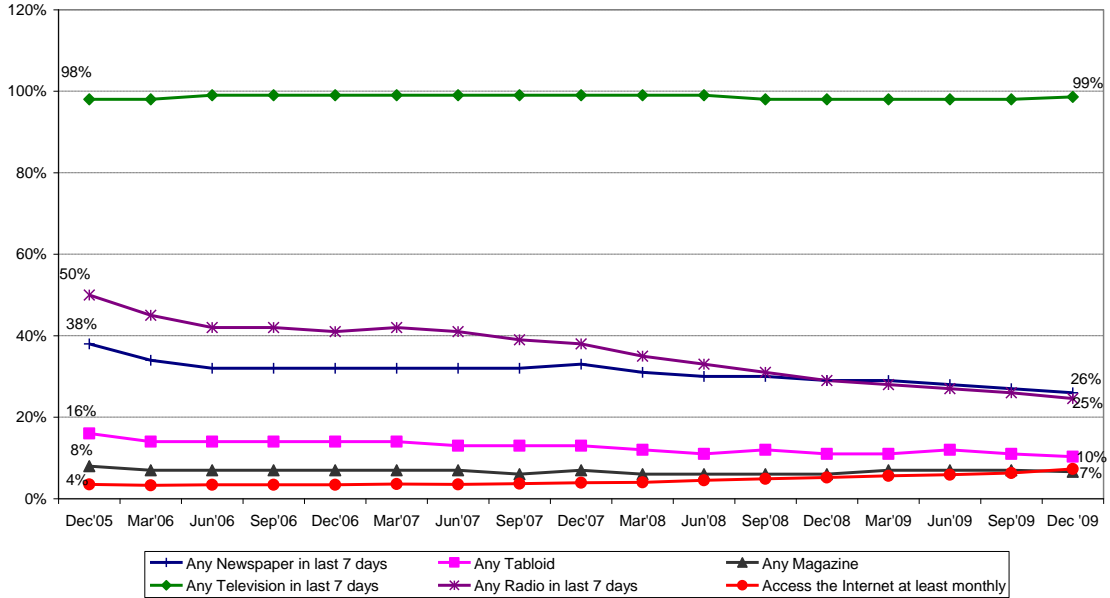
Even while the ads are on? This is the same man who will not hesitate to tell me the latest joke he’s heard while I’m trying to listen to the Iranian response to the newly revised US posture on nuclear armament. We are all passionate, at different levels of intensity, about different things. The way we engage with media - content and advertising - also varies from individual to individual, program to program. But if an audit was conducted on how the advertising rupiah is spent in Indonesia even today, too many marketers would discover that their media planners are still stuck in a time warp. “Viewers” electronically counted in cities that add up to less than 20 per cent of the population are used to deploy media budgets, nationally. Nobody stops to ask who really is “viewing”, or what the quality of the viewer’s engagement is with the program and therefore, the advertising.

Especially in a country where the only television set entertains the entire extended family living under the same roof, there is no doubt that billions are wasted on the assumption that the program is being watched with equal attention by all the viewers sitting in front of it. This will come as no surprise, with too many marketers, media owners and media buyers still talking demographics and viewership in 1-dimensional numbers. Very few professionals are talking beyond “rating points”. When those conversations are had, they are almost always linked to simple, bald, demographic definitions of target audiences. Very rarely does one hear of messages aimed at specific segments, with any mention of quality of engagement even more scarce.

At a time when we are witnessing the slow but steady decline of virtually all other media with the exception of the Internet, how the TV budget is spent should be put under far greater scrutiny than it is. Should there be a premium for programs highly rated for delivering million of eyeballs? Does anybody know how many of those eyeballs are actually part of a sharply defined target audience? Does anybody really care about the quality of their engagement with the program? In answering these questions the difference between success and failure, effective and ineffective, can be quantified in the billions of rupiah. There is no doubt that billions are still being wasted in Indonesia, every day.

The poor state of media planning and buying is due to one reason, primarily. I will call it laziness, some will call it cosiness. Marketers don’t ask the questions, planners don’t volunteer answers to questions not asked, and big media owners are happy to rake it in without any pressure from either. The language hasn’t really changed in decades. Yet the tools for doing things better are all available today. It’s just that there are only a few ready and willing to use them. The old shotgun is still the weapon of choice, not the sniper’s rifle.

TRENDS IN MEDIA CONSUMPTION, AS AT DECEMBER 2009



Here’s a simple example. “Seputar Indonesia” enjoys the highest viewership in news and current affairs programming. It also has the highest percentage of people who “really love to watch” or “especially choose to watch the program”. In other words, not just eyeballs, but keen eyeballs. On both counts, this evergreen is getting better with only one in five viewers watching “because another family member is watching” or because “there is nothing better to watch” at that time. In contrast, the popular reality show “Termehek-mehek” has one in three viewers who are victims of the family-viewing phenomenon so prevalent in the overwhelming majority of Indonesian households. What’s the relative value of the advertising rupiah spent on these two programs? It’s a question you would want to ask if it was your brand, your budget. If you get that far, the next question isn’t much further away. How many of all these viewers are part of the target audience? Definitions like “intending to buy a motorcycle”, or “open a savings account”, or the household’s “main grocery buyer” or “weight-conscious women” are easily quantified. The possibilities for zooming in with that sniper’s rifle are endless.

That’s really the only way to cut down on the wastage of shareholder funds. And yes, it can be done. Contrary to all the speeches, the media market isn’t getting all that complicated. That’s not just my opinion, the declines in the power of most other media are the reason why.

These conclusions are based on Roy Morgan Single Source, a syndicated survey with over 25,000 Indonesians 14 years and older interviewed each year. It is the only syndicated survey conducted not only in the big cities, but reflects the views from Indonesia’s towns and *kampungs* as well. The database is updated every quarter

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