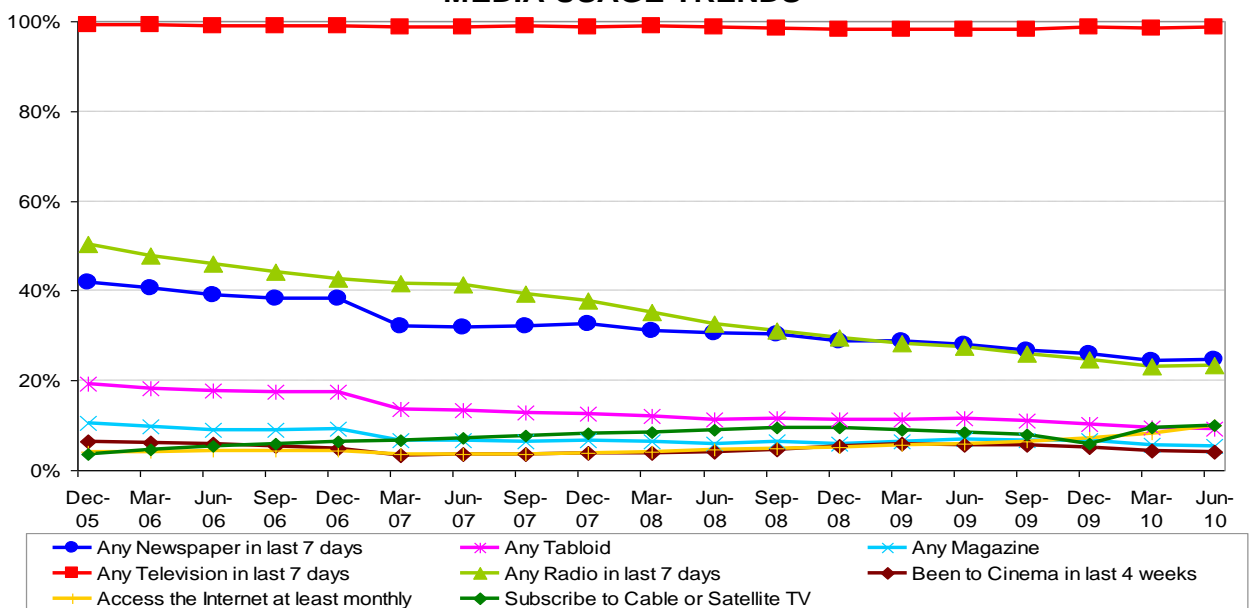


Will More Media and Less Reading Impede Progress?

Indonesia is reading less and watching more. The situation continues to deteriorate for that old habit that used to involve turning the page over with a flick of the finger, not the click of the mouse. Though the steady decline in the popularity of the newspaper seems to have levelled off after years of sliding, books aren't getting any traction. Has the printed word hit rock-bottom in Indonesia, there to remain forever? The debate continues as the media scene evolves. How are marketers adapting?

Continuing its stranglehold on the population, TV as a medium is watched by just about every Indonesian, just about everyday. Yes, there are channels dedicated to grabbing the attention of toddlers too, though they are available only on PayTV. Not much is happening within the medium, in terms of emerging genres or changes in viewership habits. Programs like *Safa dan Marwah*, *Cinta Fitri* and *Opera Van Jawa* continue to rule the charts, with 13, 12 and 11 per cent share of all viewers respectively. More precisely, that means viewers aged 14 years and older all across the country, not just the cities where TV ratings are traditionally measured. In the realm of news and current affairs, RCTI reigns supreme as usual with *Seputar Indonesia* head and shoulders above its nearest rivals *Fokus Siang* and *Liputan 6 Petang*. These are all highly rated programs with millions of viewers, enabling the media owners to demand a premium. In Indonesia, in contrast with mature media markets, TV stations unabashedly charge advertisers like cellular networks a further premium simply because that's where the money is, apparently. I should find out if Big Tobacco, Big Oil, or any other Big Whatever get selectively penalised as well. Agencies and advertisers are equally responsible for allowing this absurd situation to continue, determined to buy media 'by the kilo'. Even today, very few are influenced by sharply defined targets like "intenders", "grocery buyers" or "loyal customers". Still stuck in the dark ages, billions are squandered by using a shotgun instead of a rifle, with antiquated demographic definitions still determining where the advertising rupiah is spent. The industry has no collective forum, voice or language, unlike many many other major markets in the Asia Pacific region.

MEDIA USAGE TRENDS



Source: Roy Morgan Single Source Indonesia June 2010 (Urban)

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The old purveyor of news, the traditional newspaper, seems to have hit their lowest point. Today, some 25 per cent of the population “read a newspaper in the last 7 days”. Within that shrunken universe, Jawa Pos continues to strengthen its grip. Its readers account for 11 per cent of the population, followed by Kompas with a steady 8 per cent. At third place, Pos Kota is still losing both readers and market share. As with television, the primary focus should not be on the absolute number of readers, from an advertiser perspective. Why would you be impressed with Jawa Pos’ total number of readers if very few of them are “intending to travel by air” in the next 12 months and travellers are who you are chasing? Without doubt, newspapers remain a powerful medium for relevant products and services. The quality of attention a newspaper receives is hard to beat. Relevance is what the debate really should be about, nothing else.

Of greater concern perhaps to newspaper owners is the fact that the internet isn’t gaining the kind of traction neighbouring countries like Malaysia and Thailand have achieved. Internet penetration is climbing, too slowly, with just 10 per cent having accessed the internet in the last 4 weeks via a computer. It would be difficult to promote reading the news seriously on a mobile phone, regardless of what a technology guru with spiky hair may tell you. Only Kompas has a noteworthy population of online newsreaders, competing effectively with detik.com. Both have over 500,000 visitors on a 4-weekly basis. But around the world, the jury is still out on the future of newspaper reading online, with paid subscribers still too few to compensate for the drop in readers of the paper version. Though this decline is a global phenomenon, India’s burgeoning middle-class is bucking the trend, making it the only major market where newspapers are indeed growing, not waning. Indonesian publishers would do well to explore the Indian phenomenon. There may well be a lesson or two to be learnt about promoting the habit at school.

The tabloids too appear to be holding ground, after a long and steady decline. Collectively, they now hold the attention of 9 per cent of the population. That’s the same number achieved by the internet, on a monthly basis. The mobile and social networking appear to be taking their toll, on the internet as well as the reading habit. At 10 per cent today is the number of people who have access to PayTV. If this number continues to grow alongside the internet, there would be less to worry about. Screens that add value like Discovery Channel and BBC Knowledge can compensate to some extent for the decline in the reading habit. The internet can continue to open windows to a world much bigger than the one I grew up in, but a tiny screen will have its limitations. The future of good old fashioned, as well as new literature, will remain worrisome if the book reading habit also continues its downward spiral in Indonesia. Marketers may not worry about it today, but sociologists may well tell them to worry about the toll tomorrow. The risk of becoming more clever yet more shallow at the same time, remains. If even the privileged few become less aware of all that the world has to offer, imagine the quality of leadership that awaits society at large.

The decline of listenership of radio as a medium to 24 per cent of the population has been transferred to a large extent to listening to radio via mobiles. Small mercies radio-station owners have to be grateful for. But advertisers have got to worry about issues such as quality and duration of listening to radio on a handset. The millions of Indonesians who continue to make Facebook an ever-growing society are influencing change, not only in their worlds but for marketers and media owners as well. The march of the mobile handset and the convergence of technologies are only a question of when, not if. But a reality check of the here and now is well advised. Those numbers don’t lie. These observations are based on Roy Morgan Research. In Indonesia, it is the country’s largest syndicated survey with over 25,000 respondents annually, projected to reflect 90% of the population over the age of 14.

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