Ipsos MediaCT

The Media, Content and Technology Research Specialists

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Advertiser Funded Programming

Bite Sized Thought Piece

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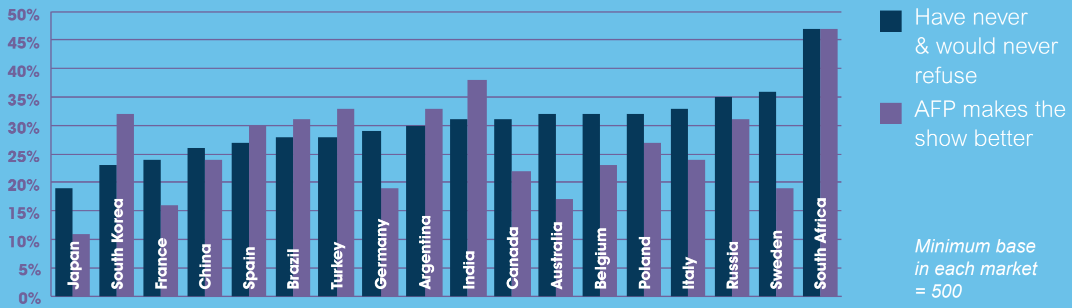
FUNDING OF TV PROGRAMMES – ASKING THE AUDIENCE

In an ever more fragmented media marketplace, brands are increasingly turning to the funding of television programmes as another method of raising awareness and profile. In return for varying levels of exposure and creative influence, a company can provide much needed funding to aid the production and betterment of a programme. Though research has been conducted to understand this area, the effort has largely focused within the industry, talking to programme makers and industry figures about the do's/don'ts and future of advertiser funded programming (AFP).

Very little work has been conducted on how the general public feels about company involvement in TV programmes, until now. In 2013, Ipsos MediaCT, in conjunction with Shine and Make World Media on behalf of the Reuters Group, conducted an online survey among a nationally representative sample of 1,500 people across three countries. The aim of the project was to find out what is acceptable and unacceptable in this area. Ipsos MORI also covered opinions on the subject in our Global Trends & Futures Survey, via an online survey administered in twenty markets.



Global Trends & Futures – Willingness to watch AFPs

VIEWER TOLERANCE

Our research for Reuters in the UK, Hong Kong and USA delivered feedback from markets with a presumed different stance on AFP. Though the findings throughout highlighted Hong Kong residents as being more likely to accept company involvement on a hypothetical level than USA (who are in turn more likely to accept than UK), it is **UK audiences who are least likely to have refused to watch an AFP in reality.**

There are also cultural differences in the level of acceptance of AFP. Our Global Trends & Futures data show that residents of South Africa seem most receptive to advertiser funded programming out of the countries surveyed. Almost half would never refuse to watch an AFP and similar numbers cite the benefits of it, including the funding it generates and the improvement it can deliver for a programme.

Elsewhere, despite comparatively high numbers recognising the benefits, India is most likely to reject advertiser funded programming across the twenty markets, with 13% having refused to watch and 11% having prevented others from watching.

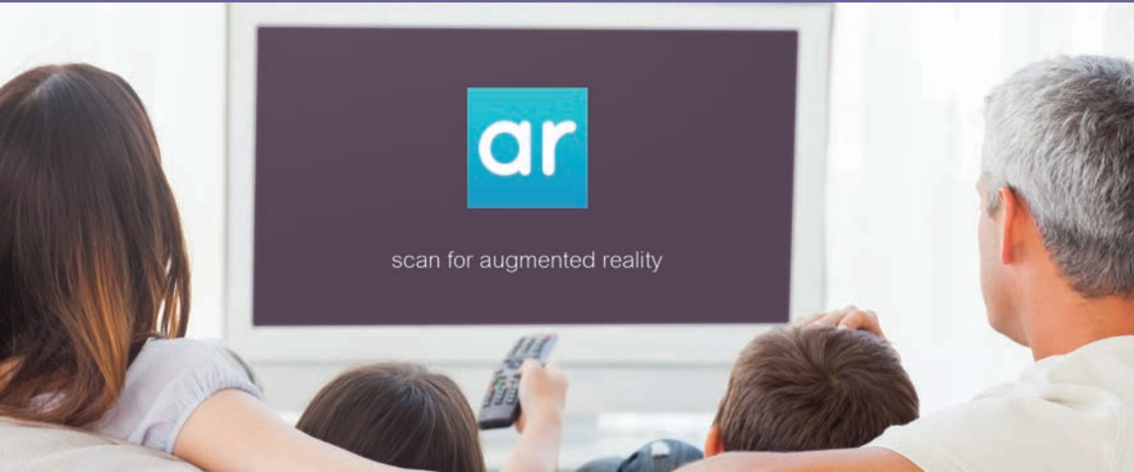
GOOD REPUTATION AND BRAND FIT

In the Reuters study, we found **high levels of company involvement within an**

AFP being accepted by viewers…to a point. We presented respondents with fictional programme synopses; among those who showed an interest in viewing we gradually layered on levels of company involvement, starting with "the programme is being funded by a company" and ending at "the company has full control over the editorial content of the programme".

In UK, USA and Hong Kong we found respondents are **prepared to watch wherever the programme and brand fit together** (e.g. a car manufacturer funding a programme about touring the British Isles) even when such brand involvement includes a credit for the company and their cars being shown on screen, named and prioritised over other manufacturers. The UK and US residents are more likely to deem it inappropriate when the brand is given editorial control over how the programme is made. In Hong Kong, there was no point where residents started to desert the programme in larger numbers.

An appropriate fit between brand and programme goes a long way towards gaining acceptance from potential viewers. Our study included several additional examples of programmes funded by seemingly appropriate brands, including a fashion show funded by a clothing chain, a cookery programme funded by a supermarket chain and a singing talent show funded by a major record



label. Between eight and nine out of ten interested viewers in all markets would accept this and still watch each show.

POOR REPUTATION AND BRAND FIT

While a good fit between programme and company will favour acceptance, **the opposite can have a huge impact on viewers.** Our study included a scenario in which an oil company funds a surfing programme, an intentionally controversial pairing. The mere mention of an oil company drove away a third of potential UK and US viewers and a further mention of environmental damage caused by the company saw even more turning away from the show.

A further scenario looked at how the public's interest in watching a serious documentary about polio treatment projects in India would be affected by the involvement of a poorly perceived company. Even a programme outside of the light entertainment spectrum is not spared as 10% of interested viewers in UK and USA decide not to watch if an oil company is funding it.

FIND YOUR BRAND & FIND YOUR LIMIT

The most striking finding from the study is how much of an effect the brand can have on propensity to watch. No one gains where the viewing audience has a negative connotation with the brand, while very little damage is done where a programme is

partnered with a brand that is either an innocuous choice or an obvious match. It seems that potential viewers **are just as wary of the choice of company as they are about how involved the company becomes** with the content of the programme.

Once an acceptable brand has been chosen, it is essential to **find a level of involvement that works for the funding company's needs while not alienating the audience** by allowing the content itself to suffer from or be dictated by them. People are more tolerant of company involvement in programmes than we expected before conducting the study and a reasonable degree of company influence will be tolerated, but be sure to find your limit in each country and stick to it.

Want to know more about the do's and don'ts of branded content? Contact the expert below.

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