

IBT campaign group meeting December 2 2008

Audiences and public engagement

Present: Mark Galloway, IBT (Chair, Lyla Adwan TW Research, Jo Barrett Progressio, Sophie Chalk IBT, Oli Courtney POLIS, Teresa Hanley Joseph Rowntree Foundation, Phil Harding, Rachel Heald Sightsavers, Anne McCabe VSO, Sarah Molloy Concern, Jeremy Nye Head of Research and Planning, BBC World, Gordon Rankin Interim Head of Marketing, DFID, Catherine Raynor VSO, Rebecca Renfro Head of Stakeholder Relations, C4, Martin Scott UEA, Siobhan Sheerin British Red Cross, Di Tatham TVE, James Thickett Director of Research, Ofcom, Terry Watkins TW Research, Sally-Ann Wilson CBA-DFID Broadcast Media Scheme

The overall aim of the meeting was to explore audience and public engagement with the wider world and with development.

James Thickett, Director of Research, Ofcom

James spoke about a number of different pieces of research conducted by Ofcom, the communications regulator. He pointed out nevertheless that there was a need for more specific research to explore this issue as the research available could not give insights into specific programmes and their appeal. It could only establish overall themes.

Several points were clear. The public recognizes that television has an important role to play in informing us about the wider world. Despite the growth of the internet, it has not supplanted tv as the main source of information about the rest of the world. There was also widespread recognition that one of the key purposes of public service broadcasting, according to Ofcom's audience research, was informing our understanding of the world.

There was also a general view that this purpose of understanding the world was being relatively well delivered at the moment and that audiences were satisfied with what was on offer. However, some channels were showing a decline in satisfaction (Channel 4 and BBC2. Others continued to enjoy high levels of satisfaction (Sky News, BBC News 24 and Discovery).

In terms of news, 'finding out what's going on in the world' was the main reason for watching tv news for 70% of viewers. Surveys show that international news is growing in importance for viewers. 4 out of 10 members of the public say they are especially interested in worldwide politics and current events. This proportion is higher amongst Abs, men and ethnic minorities (especially black Africans) – and lower amongst young people.

We still watch a lot of television (27 hours per week for adults) but the amount of time spent on the internet is growing (10½ hours per week on average).

Whilst viewers say news is especially important, audience research also indicates that other genres are important too – especially for bringing new perspectives about the world.

James also spoke about children's television. ¾ of parents believe that children's tv helps children understand what's going on in the world. This is the genre that viewers feel is not being well delivered.

A full copy of James' powerpoint presentation is available for IBT members. Please email your request to mark@ibt.org.uk

Gordon Rankin, Interim Head of Marketing, DFID

Gordon spoke about DFID's recent survey of young people aged 11-16 and their attitudes to development and the developing world. The full report will be available on the DFID website in a couple of weeks' time.

84% said they were concerned about poor people in developing countries (slightly higher than adults).

96 % agreed that we in the UK should help poor people in developing countries. Awareness of the MDGs was very low (as with adults) but awareness of fair trade was high.

School lessons and tv news were the main sources of information about the rest of the world for this group (not the internet!).

Terry Watkins, Senior Partner, TW Research

Terry spoke about in depth audience research which he is conducting on behalf of IBT and the CBA-DFID Broadcast Media Scheme. This will be published in June 2009.

Having conducted the first focus groups, some interesting trends were emerging. Audiences couldn't be narrowly categorized as interested or not interested in the wider world. People's lives are becoming more complex, with more connections, and a more elastic sense of what is relevant to them. This could potentially lead to a much greater interest in the rest of the world. There were many different points of entry – for example, the issue of piracy has generated interest in Somalia. TV programmes which had an immediate connection with people's lives were frequently mentioned – for example the Primark investigation.

Some memorable programmes included Tribal Wives, Last Man Standing, No 1 Ladies' Detective Agency, Dispatches about witch children in Nigeria, Bruce Parry's Amazon, Paul Merton in China and India.

There was wide ranging discussion about the issues raised by the speakers, and a debate about ratings and why certain programmes like No 1 Ladies got a high audience whereas Channel 4's Shooting of Thomas Hurndall got a low audience.