

Research provides new model of media consumption in 'age of interruption'

December 10 2014



The average American receives more than 15 hours a day of digital media, everything from YouTube videos and Netflix movies to computer games and text messages. But how much of that time are we really paying attention? And how is the media industry trying to keep us engaged?

These questions are the topic of "How Much Media 2: Paying Attention: How Concurrent Media Exposure, Cross Media Viewership and Multitasking Are Forever Changing Traditional Media Behaviors," produced by the Institute for Communication Technology Management

(CTM) at the USC Marshall School of Business and CTM Visiting Researcher James E. Short.

Following on CTM's "How Much Media" research last year, Short wanted to provide a more detailed picture of how Americans are consuming all of this [digital media](#).

Today we have more access to media than ever before. But we are also tuning a lot of it out. Most devices can be paused (even live TV) to accommodate our lifestyles. Further fracturing our media experiences: we tend to access multiple devices simultaneously, as when we watch a movie while texting a friend, and passively monitor content, as when we prepare dinner in the kitchen with the TV on in the background.

"We are definitely in an 'age of interruption,' given the proliferation of mobile devices that are continuously on and can be interrupted," Short said. "Viewer segments are becoming shorter and shorter; and longer-sequence media is in danger of being crowded out."

With "How Much Media 2," Short ran an attention model against his data, asking the question, "How much media, and what media, do people actually pay attention to?" He identified three primary types of media consumers and analyzed their daily media usage factoring in selective attention, multitasking and passive monitoring.

The "Young Mobiles" (18-29) are urban professionals and students, primarily using laptops, tablets, smartphones and DVR, while also utilizing TV and Internet radio. They access SVOD-DVR (only), Netflix, Pandora, online news, social media and messaging.

Accounting for selective attention and multitasking, their daily media hours are 6:52, with 39 percent of that time spent on video (including Internet and mobile video and TV) and 26 percent on communications

(including social media, messaging and voice calls).

The "Prime Time Crowd" is comprised of professionals and young urban families with two to three children in school. Traditional TV and delayed-view TV dominate. The Prime Time Crowd primarily watch TV and use devices such as DVR and DVD, while they secondarily use laptops (for email and shopping), smartphones (for video) and console gaming devices.

Accounting for selective attention and multitasking, their daily media hours are 10:35, with 65 percent of that time spent viewing video and 16 percent on communications.

The "Average American Household" is similar to the Prime Time Crowd demographic in terms of devices used: They primarily watch TV and use devices such as DVR and DVD, and they also use laptops, smartphones and console gaming devices. However, their media time is much more interrupted than the Prime Time Crowd, though less so than the Young Mobiles.

Accounting for selective attention and multitasking, their daily media hours are 8:03, with 51 percent of that time spent on video and 22 percent on communications.

"Companies were interested in our findings for the 'Young Mobiles.' They were expecting their media time to be the highest, but they did not expect that time would drop by more than half when factoring in [selective attention](#) and multitasking," Short said.

In other words, the ones with the most access to continual media are the ones watching that media in the most highly interrupted segments. How can content providers increase engagement with this demographic?

One approach is that all media needs to be shorter and sent across platforms where users can control their viewer experience, so that audiences get the message and pay attention, the research concluded. A second approach is being context aware: the key factor driving usage time for Young Mobiles is mobile access. They want media anywhere and anytime—and, most importantly, on their schedule.

The study identified additional priorities for content providers:

On Demand

Demand services are very important. If a viewer has requested an On Demand service, there is a much higher likelihood that the user will pay more attention to it and view it with less interruption. Therefore, as people get increased user control over devices and applications, the possible future of cable is evolving toward unicast (media sent to an individual device) vs. broadcast (media sent to all connected receivers). Consumers can be in control of their own programming. Furthermore, content variety and developing a flexible media mix that can reach consumers anywhere becomes even more important.

Advertising

Advertising (example: brand stories) will be told increasingly in snippets, echoing the shorter sequences and fragmentation of [media](#) attention. Telling stories in snippets, with different narrative styles and a balance of information and entertainment, facilitates consumers finding different narrative pieces in different places. Advertisers may consider telling their story across platforms (example: starting on TV, continuing on tablet and smartphone) to increase cross-platform effectiveness.

Provided by University of Southern California

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