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Speed is not everything:
How News Agencies use Audience Metrics

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Executive Summary

Ever since leading media outlets started to focus on audience metrics, news agencies as B2B news wholesalers also felt the urge to find out more about their media customers and end-users to package their content efficiently and plan the newsgathering according to customer's and audience's interest. On the basis of five interviews with high ranking news agencies editors (AAP, AP, dpa, Kyodo, Reuters), two email statements (ANSA, TASS) and an analysis of analytics tools used by 31 news agencies this paper shows different and similar approaches to audience metrics by news agencies around the globe.

- Focus on audience metrics is a recent development: Newswires always monitored their content usage in print media, but only very recently got more interested in how their content is performing on the Web and Social Media.
- Meetings, calls and emails by customers are still critical: Audience data is a relevant source of information, but direct contact with customers is just as much important.
- Audience data informed editorial decisions: Customer and end-user feedback helps to make editorial decisions, but interviewees stressed the fact that they take data informed decisions, not data driven ones.
- B2C news website as proxy: Newswires with a B2C-website can use their site as a proxy for customers websites if their content works or not. Headlines, stories or videos may be changed based on metrics. One out of three news agencies worldwide has a B2C website.
- Reduce the "waste": Audience metrics can help news agencies to identify bad performing content to change it or to shift resources to other areas of reporting.
- Not everybody has access: News agencies compared to other media organization are quite strict about access to audience data. At several newswires, only senior editors have full access to analytics.
- News agencies have diverse audiences: The B2B customer base of newswires is quite diverse ranging from media companies (text, video, audio, photo) to financial institutions and other corporate clients.
- Third-party software is very common: Most of the news agencies use free of charge Google Analytics for their B2B website or B2C news portal. More sophisticated tools like Chartbeat, Newswhip, Parse.ly are only used by big players like AP, AAP, Bloomberg and Reuters. Some homegrown tools are also used to track own content online and in print.
- General metrics dashboards: No newsroom surveyed in this report has developed yet a dashboard combining content usage metrics and social media analytics. Some editors showed interest to offer their staff a one-stop-shop for analytics.
- Analytics for video and photo: Several interviewees indicated that text audience metrics are implemented sufficiently and now there is growing interest to measure the performance and engagement of video, photo and infographic content.

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Furthermore, I owe special thanks to James Painter and Rasmus Kleis Nielsen as well as my supervisor John Pullman for their helpful corrections and comments on an earlier draft of my paper. The staff at the Reuters Institute were incredibly helpful and made my stay as easy as possible.

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1. Introduction

Which articles were the most read New York Times stories in 2016, gaining the most user interest? Last year's favourite was "Why You Will Marry the Wrong Person" followed by "Emails in Anthony Weiner Inquiry Jolt Hillary Clinton's Campaign" and "52 Places to Go in 2016". At first glance, it is surprising that an article on marriage resonated the most with the NYT audience. "Analytics are the beginning of the wisdom, not the end of it", emphasizes UK journalism lecturer Adam Tinworth, when looking at audience metrics. Before the Internet, the measure of success for newspapers came from readers' letters and calls, circulation figures, subscription numbers and print advertising revenue.

In the last few years, news organizations have stepped up their efforts to understand their web audience. Some have created sophisticated tools to track audience behaviour, others rely more on third-party software. As a result, news agencies as content suppliers have also felt the need to integrate more customer and audience feedback by using analytics. Traditionally newswires focused solely on traditional metrics like speed, scoops, accuracy and impartiality.

With the rise of social media, the audience cannot be ignored anymore and web analytics now may have an impact on editorial decision making and therefore reporting. News agencies are seen as gatekeeper of the gatekeepers; that is why small changes in their newsgathering can have a bigger impact on the media sector as well as society.

Nowadays there are many metrics measuring user interactions with content as clicks, unique users, reading time, scroll depth and social media interaction. This report argues that there are no bad metrics. It is about how news agencies use analytics and what actions they take based on audience data. For example, because of audience interest the coverage of a topic can be expanded or news packaging can be optimized.

The use of web analytics by news organizations and the effects on reporting has been researched by several academics. MacGregor (2007) showed how web analytics may influence journalists' news value and Schulz (2007) looked at the factors how reporters decide what is newsworthy. If there is uncertainty about audience measurement, this can impede editorial decision-making and editors are unsure what coverage resonates with the reader (Graves & Kelly 2010). Because of the growing importance of audience metrics Anderson (2011) sees news judgment more reliant on data and therefore less autonomous. Media companies and journalists should get beyond counting page views and build much more sophisticated metrics and keep in mind that evaluating the impact of journalism is a very difficult task, argues Stray (2012).

Tandoc (2013, 2014, and 2015) shows how web analytics has an effect on gatekeeping, the journalist's perception of the audience and competition. A more pessimistic view on analytics is offered by Petre (2015), who highlights the negative impact of metrics on journalists' morale and newsroom culture. She argued that if organizations maximize the wrong analytics, it can have disastrous results. Nevertheless, media organizations should test story characteristics, which headlines attract readers, which framing is the most compelling and therefore try to enlarge their audiences (Hindman 2015). Cherubini/Nielsen (2016) conducted cross-country research and showed how globally US- and UK-based news organizations are looking for editorial analytics instead of generic analytics.

News agencies in the last few years adapted their business model to the turbulent era of the internet (Boyd-Barrett, 2010). Barbara Czarniawska (2011) conducted ethnography research in newsrooms describing newswires as cyber factories.

Up until now, there has not been any substantial research looking at the intersection of news agencies and audience metrics. It seems that news agencies have been somewhat neglected in international media research in the last few years as the rise of social media and the crisis of the media business model has attracted much more attention. Former fellows at the Reuters Institute shed light on the recent work of newswires (Lehtovaara 2011, Griessner 2012, Gruber 2014 and Mejia 2015).

The purpose of this report is to understand the different approaches of newswires regarding audience metrics. News agencies' work differ from digital news companies, and that is why they need to find their own approach concerning audience metrics.

1.2 Methods & Research Questions

My experience as newswire business reporter and my interest in audience engagement has driven this research. Moreover I became especially interested in web analytics after reading "Editorial Analytics: How news media are developing and using audience data and metrics" by Federica Cherubini and Rasmus Kleis Nielsen of the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism. This paper is unable to encompass the entire field of audience metrics and news agencies. However, it should identify different approaches regarding analytics.

This report is based on following three research questions:

- **How do news agencies use audience data and metrics? (R1)**
- **What metrics are relevant for reporters and managing editors? (R2)**
- **How do metric influence editorial decision-making? (R3)**

I conducted semi-structured interviews with leading news agency editors, and if personal or telephone interviews were not possible, I used a questionnaire. The selection of interviewees aimed at a maximum variety from cooperative non-profit agencies like AP, ANSA and Kyodo, commercially run and owned by media like AAP and dpa, publicly traded ones like Thomson Reuters to state subsidized like TASS.

First, I will take a deeper look into academic research on audience metrics and news agencies. Second, I will show in depth how two different news agencies, AAP and dpa, use audience data. Third, I will present general findings based on my interviews and email statements.

2. News Agencies & Audience Metrics - Literature Review

This short literature review aims to link news agencies and audience metrics and give an overview on the current state of research. Since the 1980s, Oliver Boyd-Barrett has written extensively on issues of news agencies. Boyd-Barrett (2012) describes news agencies as gatekeepers of newsgathering, who are operating in small numbers, competing, collaborating, and delivering standardized content to a fragmented and diverse media industry. „Agency services are also selectively influenced by the needs and judgments of their client media“, Boyd-Barrett states. This quote stresses the fact why news agencies are increasingly interested in audience metrics and gaining more insight into customer and user behaviour.

As Boyd-Barrett and Rantanen (2010) point out, news agencies started more than 150 years ago as a business-to-business wholesaler of news, but with the internet and social media also the consumer side became more and more important. Newswire content (text, photo, video, and infographic) is nowadays available through retail clients such as online media organizations, news aggregators or other web portals. Several newswires such as ANSA, AP, Bloomberg, Reuters, or Xinhua are already offering their content for free on their own news website giving them direct access to audience metrics. News agencies owned by media companies such as Australian AAP, Austrian APA and German dpa are more cautious or restricted by their owners and operate still strictly business-to-business. For Boyd-Barrett/Rantanen the wholesale role of news agencies is still important even though news agency content is now widely available to end users without significant editing by other journalists.

The shakeup of the news industry caused by digital disruption and media ownership consolidation has also challenged the business model of several news agencies. New Zealand Press Association closed in 2011 after 132 years¹ and South African Press Association (Sapa) was shut down by its owners in 2015 after 76 years². After a failed privatization attempt the state owned Serbian Press Agency Tanjug was planned to be shut down in 2015, but is still producing news with an unclear future.³

“Business models that long sustained the operations of news agencies have undergone continual process of adaption and evolution in response to changing social and political contexts, market structure, new technologies and competition.”(Boyd-Barrett/Rantanen 2010: 237)

Rantanen (2009) highlighted several factors of change for news agencies since the 1990s: Increasing focus on B2C media and financial information customers and therefore declining dependence on traditional membership revenue, “national” agencies becoming also “global” news agencies, intensified competition in niche markets such as specialist content, IT infrastructural support and ready-made pages for newspapers.

Czarniawska (2011) conducted an ethnography of the newsrooms of the Swedish news agency TT, Italian newswire ANSA and Reuters in London. Related to audience she found that TT at

¹ <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2011/aug/29/new-zealand-press-association-close>

² <http://mg.co.za/article/2015-02-05-veteran-news-wire-agency-sapa-closes-down>

³ <http://www.balkaninsight.com/en/article/serbia-s-closed-tanjug-agency-illegally-works-for-government-experts-claim-05-16-2016>

this time got not much feedback from its clients, but at ANSA media customers called quite often.

“It is strange that we have as few contacts with our clients as we do... very little. This is one of the most important issues for us – how to receive reactions from our clients. We have no good solution for that.” (Czarniawska 2011: 182)

In another interview, a TT journalist desired more interaction with their customers:

If [clients] think something is missing, they should let us know. Unfortunately, that happens only too rarely. I don't know what it depends on – because they are so pleased or because they're so dejected? (Czarniawska 2011: 182)

These quotes show how audience metrics could help meet a need of news agencies to receive more audience and customer feedback.

One of the first researchers taking a closer look at web analytics was Phil MacGregor (2007). He interviewed 19 online journalists in print, broadcast and digital-only media organisations in the United Kingdom. He identified competing attitudes how journalists react to audience data. News and brand values were seen by journalists as a counterweight to the market-oriented goal of growing audience numbers. As a result, with audience numbers now easily accessible online journalists could choose an evidence-based approach to publishing content instead of relying on their 'gut feeling' and journalistic experience. MacGregor stated that in his interviewee sample audience data directly revised the way “news values” were implemented. It can be summarized that the social and organizational context of media organizations plays an important role in how audience data are perceived and used.

Anderson (2011) looked at local US newsrooms and the impact of audience metrics on them. He argued that there is a tension between the “productive” audience and the quantifiable and “consumptive” audience. He conducted an ethnographic analysis focusing on the techniques of audience measurement. Anderson argues that the active audience can be seen as a foundation for the notion that a reporter is less independent in his news judgment and increasingly reliant on audience data.

How are web analytics affecting the gatekeeping process? Edson C. Tandoc (2014) did a case study of three online newsrooms including 30 interviews and 150 hours of observations. Tandoc showed that the influence of the audience on newsgathering and news production is increasing. Consequently, the shrinking influence of traditional gatekeeping and the rise of influence of web analytics lead to a “process of de-selection”.

After surveying 318 journalists, Hong Tien Vu (2014) also stated that audience web metrics influence editors in gatekeeping. How editors use audience metrics is affected by their journalism training. If editors are aiming for a larger audience for business reasons, they are likely to make different editorial decisions compared to other editors.

Caitlin Petre's (2015) conducted an ethnographic analysis at the online analytics company Chartbeat, the metrics driven gossip website Gawker and the New York Time. She found that metrics can have a strong influence on journalist emotions ranging from excitement and triumph to demoralization and anxiety. If a journalist's work is evaluated based on traffic

rankings other criteria of journalistic excellence are pushed into the background. Petre points out that audience metrics linked to long-term editorial goals can be very helpful for a news organization and stimulate a discussion about where the newsroom should go. Thus, it can be problematic if journalists use metrics in an ad-hoc way because of staff shortage or lack of time.

To conclude here, the literature shows the possible impact of audience metrics on reporters and editorial decision-making. Constant user and customer feedback via analytics can be enlightening or demoralizing for reporters and editors. The next two chapters show how the Australian newswire AAP and the German news agency dpa are using audience metrics in practice.

3. Case study: AAP

The Australian Associated Press (AAP) has around 190 text reporters and editors as well as 40 photographers, video and data specialists. AAP annual revenue is around 80 million Australian Dollars (\$58 m or €57m). The leading Australian newspaper publishers are the owners of AAP: Fairfax owns 47 percent; News Corp Australia owns 45 percent and Seven West has 8 percent.

Tony Gillies, the editor in chief of the Australian Associated Press (AAP)⁴, is a proponent of audience metrics, because journalistic “gut instinct” can now be informed by audience data. As content wholesalers, news agencies have not traditionally concerned themselves with content performance, says Gillies. The AAP content must “stick” and in order to stay relevant, audience data is necessary. As a result, good performing AAP content also helps at contract renegotiation time with subscribers.

AAP editors have access to audience performance data of AAP content on customers’ websites and they can see how many AAP stories are used each day. In contrast, AAP journalists only see how their content is performing on social media. Metrics can influence news decisions on the AAP command desk - when to push harder on a story and when to drop off, Gillies explains:

“We are a wholesaler of news. Therefore our content has to appeal to a wider audience. It has to appeal to our customers...Because we have thousands of subscribers, so we need to satisfy them all in some way... We might not continue with a story, when analytics might show there is not a huge amount of interest or conversely we may have sent out a story thinking it is only small, but it ends up running hot, so we do more on it... We still need news editors and journalists to make decisions on gut instinct and experience, but they now have numbers at their fingertips to help them drive some of those decisions.”

In Gillies’ past as a newspaper journalist, he could only rely on circulations and sales figures of the newspaper and letters to the editors for audience feedback. There was no indication of how content was performing until some days after the event. Analysing the content was like looking “through a rear-view mirror”. As a news agency, Editor-in-chief Gillies welcomes the rise of audience metrics:

“Because you have instant feedback about the performance of our content and what is working and what is not working and also the type of stories that generates interest out there. It is not about the stuff that we write, it is also about the stories that other people are interested in. So we are getting a really good pulse of the community immediately, all in real time.”

AAP is using several tools to track its own content online and in print as well as content performance on social media. For finding trending news articles and videos on social media, AAP uses Newswhip Spike that monitors the velocity of content. Velocity measures the rate of Facebook and Twitter Interactions in a short period of time. If a piece of content by another

⁴ Tony Gillies, AAP, Interviewed 18. Oct. 2016

news organization is performing very well on social media and AAP has not delivered something similar, AAP journalists may also do a story on this topic. In the AAP newsroom, there is a heads up display to inform journalists and editors what is currently trending on Newswhip Spike.

Audience metrics at AAP include analytics about AAP content, publishers' content and social media referrals. Newswhip Spike has two columns, everyone's trending stories in real time and AAP stories. Another tool AAP uses is called Trendsmap. It shows hot topics by geography and it helps AAP journalists and editors to screen Twitter in a fast breaking news environment.

For Gillies audience metrics are important, but only one source of several for making editorial decisions:

"With all of these tools at our fingertips, we still have our own means of deciding which stories to cover and which we don't. We don't do everything by the numbers and then ignore all our own instincts. We still have that; there is still a lot of traditional newsgathering practice in play, which we continue to deploy. The numbers and the traditional process are merged together quite well."

To have frequent direct contact with customers via phone or email is still very important for the editor-in-chief:

"Always on the phone to the desk, always sending emails, 'hey guys you are covering this, or you are doing that, when can I expect this story'... They just do it the old fashion way in any case go direct to an editor. We get it every day, if i would look at today's emails. This is what happens every day. Is there an update coming on? We get from these guys probably about eight or nine of those a day. We have to respond to. It can be 50 emails and phone calls, but this is what they have to do. I don't want to make it impersonal. I think news is very personal in the relationship we have with our subscribers."

Audience data cannot provide instant interactive feedback as phone calls, emails or meetings as Gillies highlights:

"You need that interactivity. I don't want there to be silence, I don't want our subscribers to suddenly become a faceless figure on the other end of an email... I want to understand why they need what they need. I want our editors never to lose sight of that as well. They need to own the relationship too. I agree it could be more efficient, it is not a priority. It really is not. The priority for me, making sure we have the best most trusted relationship we have.... This is a very personal business... One should not override the other; our success is a sum of all of those parts, not just one."

Compared to other news agencies it is surprising that several of AAP's key subscribers, for example News Corp Australia, share their real time content performance analytics with the Australian newswire.

"We have a very trusting relationship with our key shareholders... They are happy for us to have it, because they want us to give them more relevant content. They want us to understand what works for them and what doesn't work for them.... If you want the relationship to work;

the content has to work, if both parties want genuinely the same thing. They want audience increases; we want our content to work. There is no harm. We don't take the audience data from all our clients, we discuss it with them. We want to give them the best possible service."

News Fetch

To monitor the usage of AAP content by print newspapers and digital media outlets the news agency has developed its own content monitoring tool called News Fetch. The trawling software matches AAP daily newswire content word-for-word with stories published in every newspaper and on every major news website in Australia. The software scans PDFs of every newspaper page and it can access online content in front of and behind paywalls. At 11am the next day AAP editors get a metrics report: they can see how often each of around AAP 800 stories from the day before were used and which were not used at all. News Fetch shows which stories were used the most by which publishers, what topics resonated the most, and the split between online and print usage. Furthermore, News Fetch provides data about the usage of partner content for example AP stories via AAP and how many stories from each AAP journalist were used by other media outlets. After careful consideration over a reasonable timeframe, AAP editors make decisions about which topics to focus on more and which to avoid.



Figure 1 AAP News Fetch

AAP introduced News Fetch for print articles in 2014 and monitoring content online started mid-2015. Gillies explains why News Fetch was implemented:

"The aim and objective of a news agency with its content is not get one story published once, to get a story published nine or ten times, or even more times. That's the success of a news agency story, otherwise it doesn't work, why would you have a news agency... To assess the figures, doing it daily, it distorts the reality... because the news cycle changes so wildly and we are producing so many stories. To make decisions about which stories you want to do in the future versus you don't want to do, you need a very broad window on which to view things. I like to make those decisions after about three months."

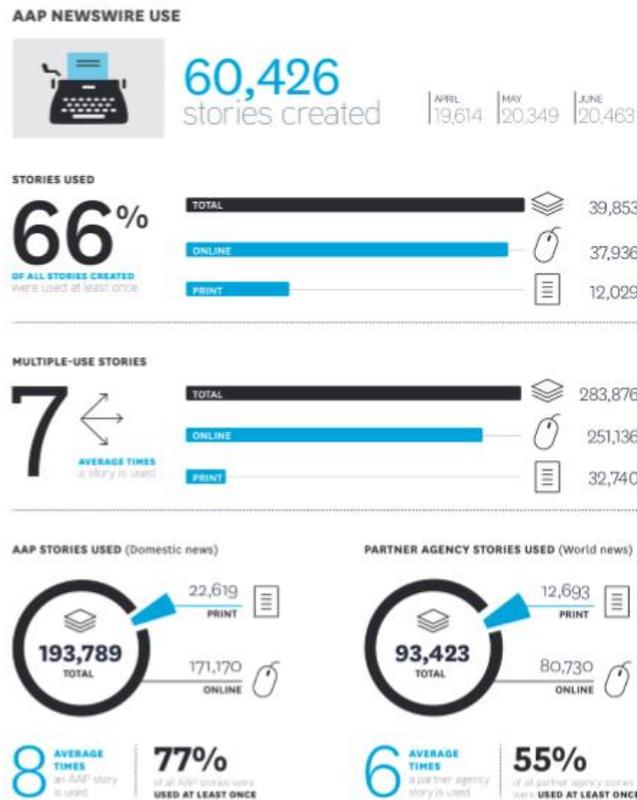


Figure 2 AAP News Fetch AAP Newswire Use

The AAP editor-in-chief does not evaluate his journalists work by clicks and other audience metrics or link bonuses to such metrics:

“It would skew their behaviour, because they would be driven by, a need to write more stories, so I put less emphasis on that. Because they want to get their numbers up they may chase stories we don’t want them to chase and that’s wrong. There are publishers, who measure clicks and reporter’s story performance... We are a B2B-operation, we are writing stories for a whole range of print, online and mobile publications. I can see why a journalist’s performance might be measured for an individual masthead. For us it is different. We are writing for everybody, I don’t see their output measured that way.”

At AAP only editors have access to News Fetch; reporters can use audience metrics by Newswhip, Chartbeat and Trendsmap. Gillies explains the reasons for that:

“I don’t want to give the journalists the wrong idea. I don’t want journalists thinking of how to change their work. I don’t want them under added pressure, worried they have not written as many stories as the person next to them. It does take longer to write a court story than it does to write an entertainment story for example, there are too many variables. It is not about withholding information necessarily, because information is very useful, but too much information can be counterproductive.”

Gillies is concerned that AAP content metrics could have a strong impact on day-to-day reporting by AAP journalists, that’s why this kind of data is restricted to editors.

“At the end of the day, I want the journalists out there writing stories and don’t want to get

them too consumed with numbers. Not that I don't trust them to do it. The journalists need to understand how we measure our data and what we see as important, they all have a different view of what is important and not. They take a highly personalized view; I am taking a more agency view of performance. I encourage to use it, but I don't demand the journalists to use it."

Newswhip Spike

The third party software Newswhip Spike helps AAP editors and reporters to track news that is breaking on social media and find trending articles, which are resonating with Australian audiences. The speed at which news breaks and spreads across social networks is measured through "velocity" and based on the numbers on Facebook/Twitter shares per story. AAP journalists use Newswhip Spike to assess the "shareability" and "likeability" of AAP key stories and find story ideas with traffic potential.

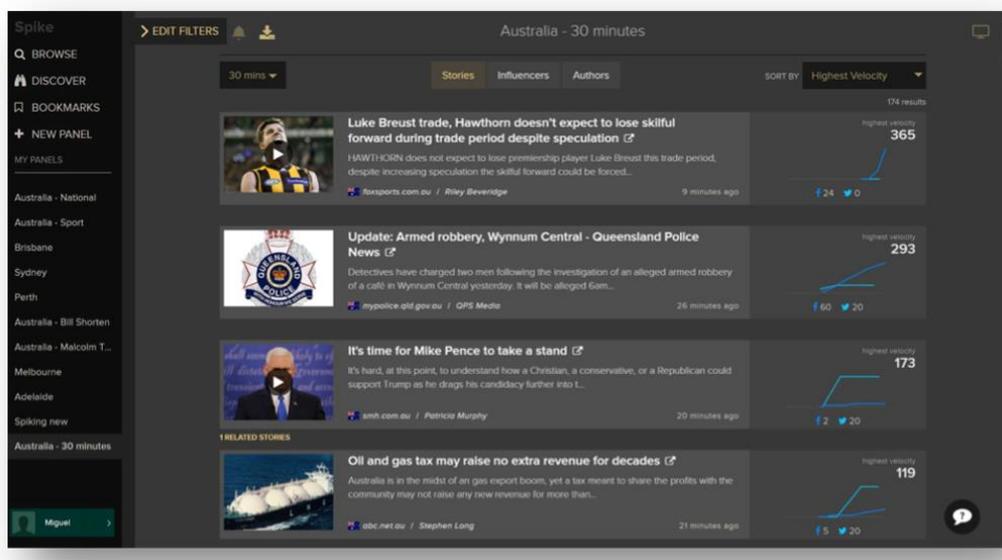


Figure 3: Newswhip Spike

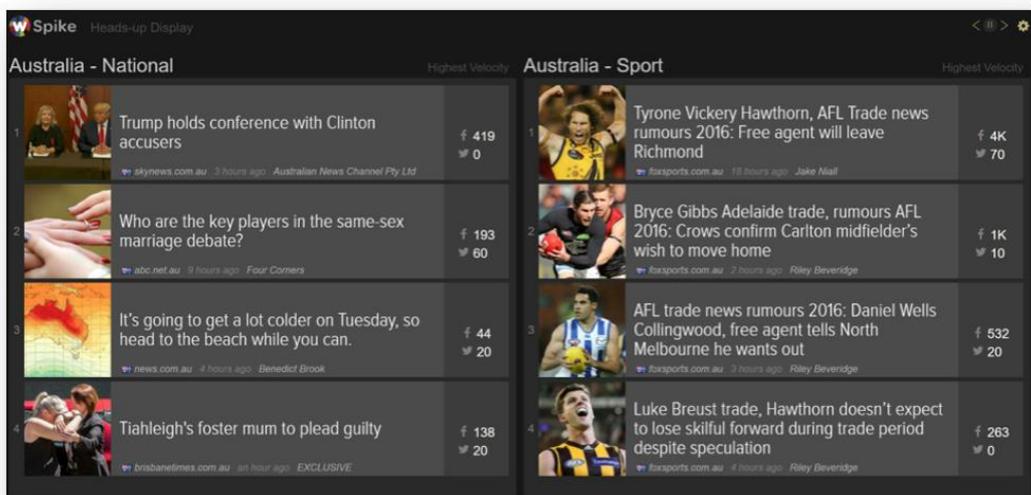


Figure 4: Newswhip Spike Heads-up display

Spike's head-up display shows details of AAP's most shared, most liked and most discussed stories, to keep AAP's journalists and editors up to date.

Chartbeast

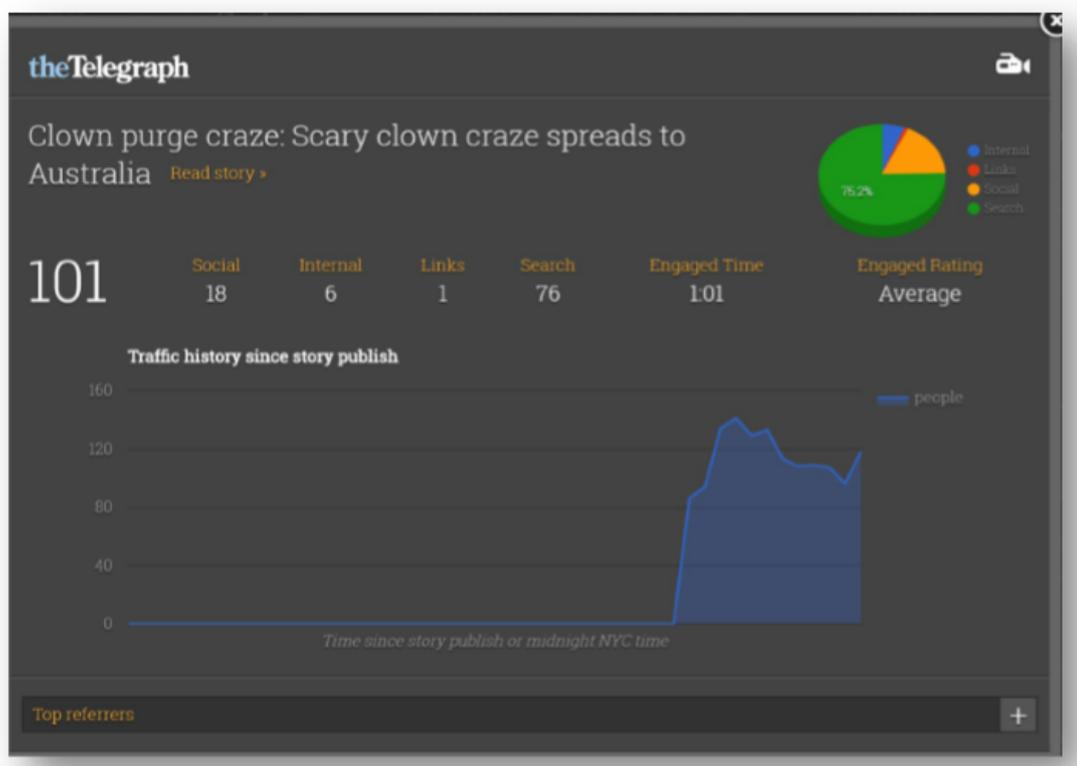


Figure 5: Chartbeast used by Australian news organization "The Telegraph"

Chartbeast is News Corp's audience metrics tool that is shared with AAP to help the newswire to understand which content is performing well with the News Corp audience. NewsCorp changed Chartbeat a bit and calls its tool Chartbeast. Chartbeast allows AAP's editors to track popular News Corp and AAP stories as they perform according to user page impressions, individual clicks and social media performance. In addition, several other customers share their audience metrics tool Chartbeat with AAP.

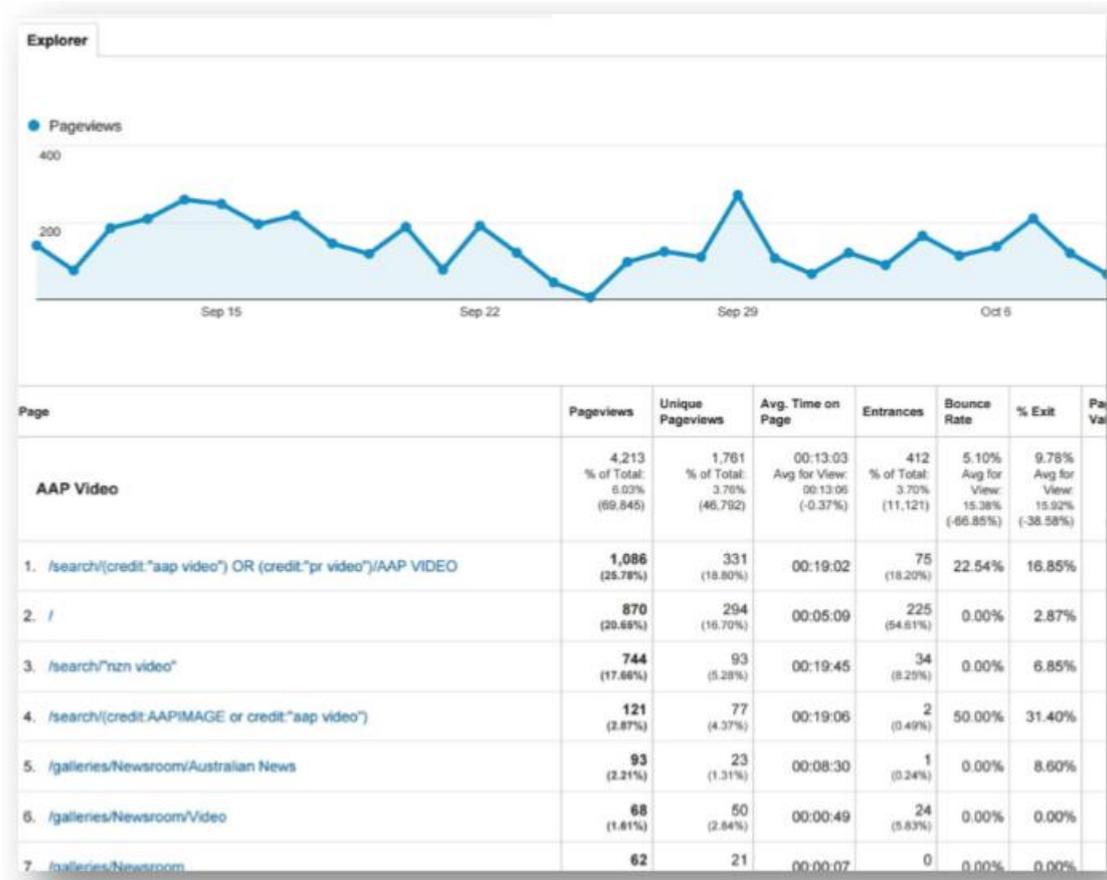


Figure 6: Google Analytics used by AAP

AAP monitors its own website via Google Analytics, primarily to identify customers' preferences about images and video content. Google Analytics tracks the performance of AAP video/images and how often clients download it. The news agency wants to find out the type of content AAP customers are using, when they are seeking it and how soon after an event they are looking for it.

According to Google Analytics data AAP clients' visits peak daily between 10am and 12pm. The most-visited page after the website's homepage is "Australian News" followed by "AAP Video" and "NZ Video". Most traffic comes organically or directly, referred by the newswire website or via AAP Twitter feed.

Audience data is important, but direct contact with customers is just as important for AAP editors. Gillies explains:

"It is a constant conversation with our customers. That seems very old school seeing news directors, picture editors and executive video editors. Talking to them constantly about the stuff that works and doesn't work, is the way we tweak our content. It is a combination of all of those things, it can never be one. To work effectively, it has to be a combination of all of those methods. You can't say I have the numbers, so that will do. That is not good enough. Because there are so many variables. It is never accurate."

Editorial decision making at AAP has changed notably after introducing News Fetch, Chartbeat and Newswhip Spike and helped the newswire to be ahead of the curve:

"We have always been responsive to news as it breaks. Now we are a little bit more proactive...It takes away a bit of the guess work...It might surprise some to know that it is not working...and that's what News Fetch does. We are looking at numbers at a three month period."

Gillies highlights one example, where audience metrics lead to the editorial decision to reduce entertainment news:

"Everybody talks about the importance of entertainment news. You have to have entertainment news on your wire and we certainly do that and we got to a point, where we did 80 to 90 entertainment stories per day. But the reality was that our subscribers were not valuing it. Our subscribers value genuine breaking news. ... But the entertainment news that is about celebrity gossip, that's ubiquitous, is content you can source it from anywhere."

You can trawl Social Media for it, you can scrape it of websites and you can create a news entertainment source that covers all of those things, but people don't value it, our subscribers don't value it...What we did as a result of all that, and that is fairly recent, is that we cut back our entertainment news by 70 percent. We really reduced it; we left it to genuine breaking entertainment news."

Freed resources from entertainment news were allocated to court reporting. This type of original content has a higher value for AAP customers than entertainment. Gillies says:

"The coverage of courts, you can't scrape that from a website...You have to be there. We have tripled our resources on courts and dramatically reduced our resources to entertainment as a result of News Fetch, because we can understand what people were wanting and not wanting"

Talking to media customers' editors including discussions about audience metrics has helped AAP to analyze their own content more in detail.

"When you talk to them, and it is important to talk to them, it is a very big part we do, but when you talk with them it is all anecdotal. The numbers give you some clarity around performance. It gives you some really direct questions you can ask. How has it changed us? It helps us analyse our content and review our content a lot better. We are challenging a lot of those things we intuitively think is right, but found that are not. We can do a lot more with confidence, let's do this and this and more of that and know that we are doing that successfully."

Audience metrics have given AAP the possibility to show their subscribers the performance and value of their original content:

"We are talking about the original content, you can't fake it. In that category is court as I mentioned, covering sports matches and politics, the parliamentary proceedings. You have to be there, and what we are finding is that we are able to reinforce our value to our subscribers by doing more of that stuff and less of that stuff that doesn't matter.... We can provide more value by producing content that gives more value to their mastheads their publications... What the analytics helps us do, it helps us saying no to things and we can give better effort to those things that we really need to focus on, to things that are really important to our subscribers. That is how analytics really changed us."

Outlook – Audience Metrics at AAP

Audience Metrics will play a key role in shaping the future of AAP as a news agency. The editor-in-chiefs stresses a reflective practice:

“They are here to stay, but it is going to be in context. I don’t want the numbers to override the personality of what we do. News is a very personal business...We add value because we know how to assess, we know how to respond to things, I think that is what good journalists do, this is what good editors do. I don’t want to lose that skill set; I don’t want our newsroom to ignore that. I am very happy that we have the newsroom analytics. We struck the right balance on what we do.....Because we have thousands of subscribers for us to change a product set, to suit one might upset others.”

Gillies wants to have more insights about the video usage by its customers:

“Video is an area where I want to do more analytics, the streaming on videos is absolutely critical. Video is the most vulnerable...video streams have a direct impact on revenue. The performance of video is critical...We understand which of your video content gets used. On views we rely on our subscribers to give us that information. For example, they are happy to share it from time to time. When we ask for it, we get it. The approach we take on video is based on the conversation. Video is gone in an instant, it happens and it is gone in an instant. You can’t tweak it to the day...You understand the lessons learned from a piece of video you thought it might work and it doesn’t work. So you do better the next time.

Newswire video content cannot be changed after it is published. AAP aims to produce the type of videos their customers are looking for:

“We know the type of video that works for our subscribers, they tell us the type of video that works, what they really want out of it. That is what we respond to. Breaking news video has a surprisingly short shelf life. It might be an hour, it is high volume, high turnover that is difficult, video that has a longer shelf life, the highly exclusive video that everyone must see; videos where stories are explained, is the video that can stay on the site all day.”

In addition the performance of photographs will get more attention at AAP in the future:

“We understand usage of our photos. I don’t know how many eyeballs our photos are attracting. That is the sort of data that would be of interest to us. Understand how photos perform. Understand more how video performs, that is our next step. Rather than simply relying on the graces of our subscribers to give us that information. We need to understand that more, going a little bit deeper would be good. This would be very helpful information for us.

In the last two years AAP did a bold move to integrate audience metrics into their newsgathering process, by not ignoring traditional areas of audience feedback and journalistic experience.

4. Case study: dpa

The German Press Agency dpa employs around 1,300 journalists worldwide and generated revenue of 94 million euro in 2016⁵. dpa is a private limited liability company under German law (GmbH) with 182 German shareholders consisting of newspaper and magazine publishers, broadcasting corporations and media groups. No dpa shareholder is allowed to own more than 1.5 per cent, with a maximum of 25 percent of share capital being held by broadcasters.⁶

dpa has monitored the usage of its text content in print newspapers for more than two decades by using the tool “Presse Monitor”. Since spring 2016 dpa is also looking at the newswire text content usage online. The print monitoring tool compares dpa with its competitors Reuters and AFP and how often dpa’s articles were used by newspapers about a specific topic and event. The online monitoring tool shows the content usage by customers, but not competitors.

In contrast to AAP, every dpa journalist has access to the online monitoring tool.

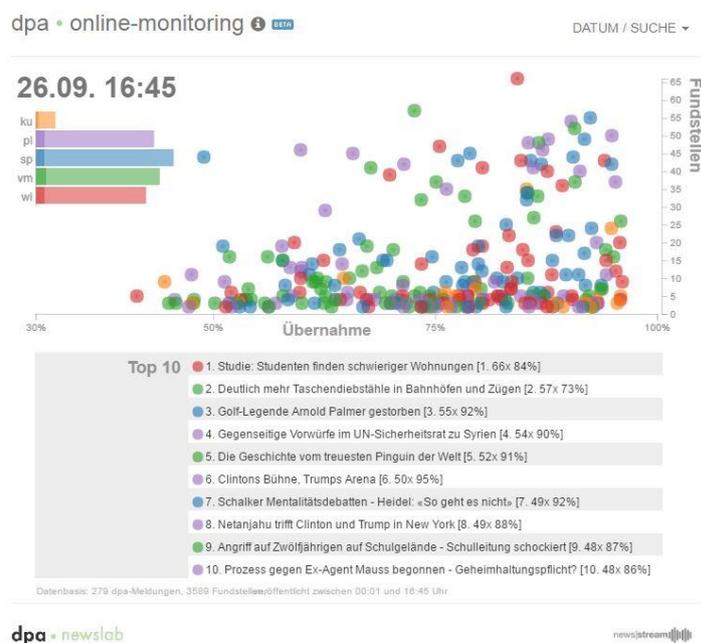


Figure 7: dpa online monitoring

⁵ <https://www.dpa.com/en/company/facts-and-figures/>

⁶ <https://www.dpa.com/en/company/ownership-structure/#ownership-structure>

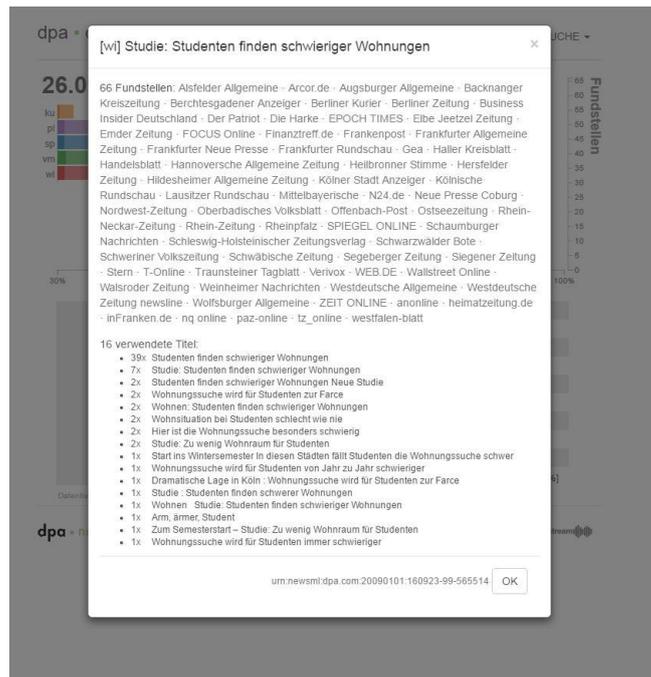


Figure 8: dpa online monitor - Analysis

dpa head of news, Froben Homburger explains why the news agency started to focus on audience metrics⁷:

“It was our goal to confront our colleagues with the online world. It is about the decision how to write something, which subject to cover in a big way. Print media was always beared in mind. We had only the figures, which stories were used in print the next day. That is why we urgently needed an online monitoring tool, which tells the journalists, maybe your story in newspapers has not been a hit, but online it was Top 2 in the panorama section... To consider why it is performing online well, but actually not in the newspapers.”

The audience metrics analysis at dpa is an ongoing process starting with print usage from the day before in the morning. Then between 12pm and 1pm Twitter Analytics are collected by the head of news, and the analysis of online monitoring is done between 3pm and 4pm. Finally, a metrics report is sent via internal dpa text system and email to several hundred dpa employees. All metrics are also accessible at the customer portal dpanews.de

At dpanews.de, news editors select the most important stories for their B2B customers, for example a B2C news website. Every month a report shows how many times subsites at dpanews.de like Politics, Business or Sports were clicked and which customers were most active. Dpanews.de works as a backup for customers, giving them an overview of what dpa thinks are currently the most relevant stories.

The establishment of a customer portal connecting all different content types was a “eureka moment” for the newsroom, says Homburger. Nowadays dpa clients can access dpa content packaged and prioritized.

⁷ Froben Homburger and Christopher Weckwerth, Interviewed by Christoph Schlemmer, 18. Oct. 2016

Editorial Decisions based on Audience Metrics

The dpa head of news stresses the fact that because there are specific metrics, the news programme agenda is not overthrown easily. There are various aspects influencing editorial decision-making: for example, a topic is heavily discussed on Twitter and a specific aspect is not covered extensively by dpa or customers' requests on dpanews.de. dpa uses also the news monitoring website Newstral, which monitors the Top 3 stories by all major German news websites. Homburger explains how dpa is acting on audience metrics:

"We take a look at our coverage if it actually corresponds to the current news flow or if we have to refine, prioritize or readjust. It is a permanent process and not a process where there is a certain point in time, when we have a metrics result and based on this result we change our program... Of course, we observe metrics very carefully, at different levels and talk about it in conversations with customers. If some formats have noticeable less resonance with newspapers and we cannot explain exactly why, then we also question such formats... We are already looking intensely at how our customers use the service and try to make conclusions about the service, but also for internal procedures, personnel and structural questions."

Because of audience metrics and direct customer feedback dpa has strengthened the morning news production including staffing, says Homburger.

dpa currently takes a closer look at the usage of content produced by regional dpa bureaus in Germany. The news agency analyses what is used by which customers, at what time and what the customers expect from dpa. Homburger describes how the analysing process on regional bureaus content is working:

"We have a look how often it is used in print and online. And we talk a lot about that with our customers, especially with the regional ones, asking when do you really need something from the region. As this information flows into a pot, a separate profile is developed for each regional service. The big mistake made at dpa earlier is that a structure for national reporting has been applied on all regional services, without seeing that this varies according to each federal state. It is a different newspaper and media landscape and you cannot put it like a blueprint on all regional services. You have to look at each federal state and draw conclusions for the regional service."

Since early 2013 dpa is using Twitter and gets audience metrics also from this platform. Mainly dpa links to its own content used by customers on their website and retweets tweets by dpa reporters in the field using the hashtag #dpareporter. Homburger says:

"How many impressions did we have, which three tweets had the most impressions or also particularly noticeable interactivity rates? We evaluate this every day... and this has a pedagogical background like the online monitoring influencing how colleagues see social media."

Dpa does not tweet breaking news because it is a business-to-business news organization and restricted to that by its owners. Homburger feels that "tweeting is a bit of a balancing act" for dpa, because the news agencies main mission is to deliver to news organizations, not to turn

to end customers. "It is new that news agencies actually engage in an interaction with readers", the head of news says.

Dpa reporter Christopher Weckwerth, specialist for social media and audience listening, points to customer contact as an important feedback channel:

"In general, we gain many insights through customer visits. Leading dpa editors visit media customers and newspaper editors come to dpa for example in the "change your seat"-program. They look at the workflows and, of course, also say how they work with our content and what could be more suitable for them."

Audience Metrics Outlook at dpa

Dpa's focus on a wide range of audience metrics is relatively new, except the monitoring of dpa content in newspapers. In addition, dpa gets considerable audience feedback by talking with customers and subscribers. Currently topic and social media monitoring is high on the agenda for the German newswire. In the last few months dpa has further developed its online monitoring tool that also topics not only articles are tracked and the software can show the usage of dpa articles by media customers in the last six hours and the last 24 hours. The improved online monitoring tool was implemented mid-2017.

Furthermore, audience metrics help dpa to react to customers' needs for much greater format diversity. The content usage by customers can be a strong signal if content formats work or not.

5. How News Agencies use Audience Data

This chapter is based on interviews with editors and metrics experts at AAP, AP, ANSA, dpa, Kyodo, Reuters and TASS and an analysis of analytics tools used by news agencies. Lead by the research questions, the chapter shows the differences and similarities between the newswires and their approach to audience metrics.

5.1 AP, ANSA, Kyodo, Reuters, TASS vs. AAP, dpa

News agencies with their own B2C news website can use end-user audience data to inform their editorial decision-making. Relevant data includes visits and clicks, unique clients and returning visitors, reading time, recirculation and social media referrals.

Bloomberg.com and Reuters.com have big global audiences and can analyse user behaviour on their website (e.g. reading time, scroll depth and recirculation). It is important to note that metrics from end-user audiences at Bloomberg.com and Reuters.com can't be applied to B2B terminal customers at Bloomberg and Reuters or other professional financial news customers and vice versa because user interests differ substantially.

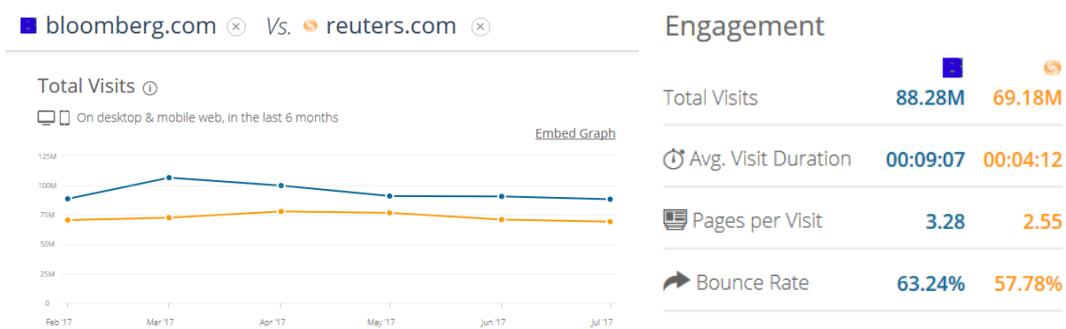


Figure 9: Bloomberg.com vs. Reuters.com Total Visits & Engagement

The Associated Press (AP) uses its end-user news website apnews.com as a proxy for other media customers. Because of audience metrics from apnews.com website AP editors will try, for example, a different headline or improve the content, AP Global news editor Mark Davies explains⁸. The Italian newswire ANSA operates a comparable big B2C news website in Italy giving the newswire numerous data on audience behaviour. ANSA uses the “real-time” panel of Google Analytics to understand which are the best performing stories on their website and then give them more visibility there.⁹ The Japanese newswire Kyodo has collaborated with its newspaper owners and established the B2C news platform News47 and Kyodo also has an end user news website. On both sites audience behaviour is monitored with Google

⁸ Mark Davies, AP, interviewed 23. Nov. 2016

⁹ Giacomo Vedovato, ANSA, Statement 5. Dec. 2016

Analytics.¹⁰ State funded Russian news agency TASS has also a news website and uses the analytics tool Popsters.ru.¹¹

News agencies with no B2C news website such as AAP or dpa are trying to work around that missing audience link by using software to track their content in print newspapers, on media customers' websites and on social media.

5.2 Between general and niche audiences

Several news agencies highlighted the fact that they have to serve heterogeneous audiences from digital, TV, print, radio and for some also financial customers. Several news agency editors stated that B2B and end-user interests can differ strongly or are even opposed. Therefore, end-user audience metrics should be treated with caution, but are an important part of the audience puzzle for newswires.

Reuters serves mass audiences as well as niche audiences, which are an important part of the customer base. Reuter's digital strategist Reg Chua¹² says:

"Our newsroom supports different customer sets with different interests. There are at least three main sets: Financial professionals such as commodity or equity traders or researchers on the Eikon terminal; media customers such as broadcasters or newspapers; and visitors to reuters.com. We use audience metrics as well as discussions with those customer sets to better understand their news needs. Unlike some other news organizations, we serve very specialized and segmented audiences. So in some cases it may be that even a small audience of say 100 people might be very important, if those 100 people are key financial professional customers. So for us simply aggregating the readership numbers doesn't work; it is not a simple metric."

All editors and metrics experts at news agencies interviewed for this paper indicated that audience metrics are playing an increasingly important role, but don't drive the agenda of news gathering. It is a relevant new data set, but calls, e-mails and meeting with customers still play a very important role. By combining qualitative anecdotal feedback and quantitative audience data, newswire will have a 360-degree view of their relationship with customers and end-users.

5.3 Audience Metrics and Editorial decision making

As a benchmark example for other news agencies, Table 1 gives a closer look at Reuters and what role audience metrics play there:

¹⁰ Kakuya Ogata, Kyodo, interviewed 2. Dec. 2016

¹¹ Sergey Sloutskov, TASS, Statement 16. Nov. 2016

¹² Reg Chua, Reuters, interviewed 30. Nov. 2016

Table 1. Audience metrics at Reuters

Product segment	Metrics
Thomson Reuters Eikon terminal	Clicks, search data
News agency business (content published via customers)	
- Text content	No systematic tracking on end-customer use yet
- Photo/Graphics	Downloads from customer-facing site. Scraping websites to look for use of Reuters photographs
- Video/TV	Downloads, Tracking via watermark
- Content on Social Media	No systematic tracking of use by customers, but data available on Reuters use of social media
Reuters.com Website	Unique Users, Visits, Time on site

Reg Chua explains how Reuters tracks its content:

“Our TV staff use watermarks to track usage of Reuters footage by broadcasters. They also engage with customers (i.e. broadcasters) regularly to understand their needs. In photos, we scrape websites to get a sense of usage of Reuters photography. We can also track what customers download from a customer-facing platform, but that doesn’t tell us which photos are ultimately used. The photo staff is also in regular contact with customers, as are the graphics staff. With text, it can be more complicated, given how customers might use our content – for example, they could simply run an entire Reuters story, but they could also take parts of it and combine it with their own reporting.”

Some content, which is produced by Reuters, helps reporters to stay informed, but is not used editorially. Chua says:

“Or they could use our service to alert them to stories they might want to cover themselves, and to inform their reporting. Simply looking at usage of Reuters stories in our agency customers doesn’t convey the full value of what we provide them. Similarly, Reuters news alerts help newsrooms by telling them about key news events, but they may not publish our content at all. In the same way, our graphics content might also be used by customers to generate their own ideas, or to provide them with data for their own graphics. We also move our content on social media platforms and we do track their pickup there.”

Because of audience metrics content will be adjusted at Reuters:

“Audience feedback is another way to understand customer needs. For example, it’s clear that many of our financial readers prefer shorter stories; we also know that many viewers of our packaged video prefer shorter videos and subtitles, because they may be viewing them with the sound turned off. These insights are generally gained by talking to customers or intuiting their preferences from usage.”

Also the Associated Press (AP) has shown a growing appetite for audience data: AP has partnered with Newswhip to find out on which client sites AP content is used. Based on this data, the top 10 or top 20 stories of the day are highlighted. Furthermore Chartbeat is implemented on apnews.com giving journalists an opportunity to understand audience engagement. If customer use is low, because of a weak headline or the intro is not working, then editors will try to optimize it and put out an improved version.

For the tracking of AP video content on TV the news agency uses Teletrax watermarking. Because of this tool the wastage, meaning not used video material, dropped from 15 to 2 percent over several years. This tracking tool saved AP a lot of production time.¹³

Anecdotal examples provided by AAP, AP, dpa and Reuters show how audience metrics can influence editorial decision making. Because of analytics AAP recently reduced its articles on celebrities and increased its court coverage. Nowadays AP may change headlines or story approach based on Chartbeat analytics of apnews.com and thanks to analytics reduced the wastage of video content dramatically. dpa is evaluating its regional coverage in each federal state partly based on audience metrics. Reuters will package their news based on diverse customer needs informed by analytics.

5.4 Third party software

If there are not enough resources for a newswire to build an own audience metrics tool, third party software can help them to get started. For this paper, B2C and B2B websites of all major news agencies were monitored with the Anti-Tracking-Tool, Ghostery. Most of the newswires rely on Google Analytics for audience metrics concerning their B2B website. (See Table 2) Ten out of thirty agencies have a news website for end users, also relying heavily on Google Analytics. Only AP and Reuters have Chartbeat on their own B2C website in use, an audience metrics tool tailored for newsrooms. AAP has access to web analytics of media customers and uses Newswhip. 11 out of 31 news agencies operate a B2C news website.

¹³ Mark Davies and Jim Kennedy, interviewed 23. Nov. 2016

Table 2: Audience metrics third party software

News Agencies	Country	B2B website	Also B2C news website
AA	Turkey	Google Analytics, Alexa Metrics	Google Analytics, Alexa Metrics
AAP	Australia	Google Analytics (aap.com.au),	-
AFP	France, globally	Google Analytics, eStat	-
Agencia Brasil	Brazil	Google Analytics	-
Agerpres	Romania	No audience tracker	No audience tracker
ANA	South Africa, Africa	Google Analytics	-
ANP	Netherlands	Google Analytics	-
APA	Austria	Google Analytics	-
AP	US, globally	Google Analytics, Newswhip (ap.org)	Chartbeat, Google Analytics, Newswhip (apnews.com)
Belga	Belgium	No audience tracking	-
Bloomberg	US, globally	Google Analytics	Google Analytics, Parse.ly
CTK	Czech Republic	Google Analytics	-
Dpa	Germany, globally	Google Analytics	-
dpa AFX	Germany	Google Analytics	-
Dow Jones	US, globally	No audience tracker	-
EFE	Spain, globally	Google Analytics	Google Analytics
Interfax	Russia	Rambler	-
JTA	Israel	Google Analytics	Google Analytics
Kyodo	Japan	Google Analytics	Google Analytics, Ptengine
MENA	Egypt	Google Analytics	
MTI	Hungary	Google Analytics	-

PA	UK	Inspectlet	-
PTI	India	Google Analytics	Google Analytics
Reuters	UK, globally	Omniure (Adobe Analytics)	Chartbeat
Ritzau	Denmark	Google Analytics, Hotjar	
SID	Germany	Google Analytics	
sda	Switzerland	No audience tracker	
TASS	Russia		Yandex Metrics
The Canadian Press	Canada	Google Analytics	
TT	Sweden	Google Analytics	
Xinhua	China		Dratio
=31 news agencies			11 B2C news websites

5.5 Who has access to Audience Metrics

The access to audience data is restricted at some news agencies. At Australian newswire AAP journalists can see audience data from Chartbeat and Newswhip Spike, but only editors can analyze AAP content usage by customers in print and online. At Reuters reporters cannot see how their stories are performing. Reg Chua explains:

“Mid- to senior-level journalists have access to terminal and website audience data. We look at the click data from a strategic point, not how many clicks a story generated.”

At AP over 150 users have access to Newswhip tracking AP content. Chartbeat data is also available to regional desk editors. All AP news staff have access to a dashboard showing a range of metrics drawn from NewsWhip, Teletrax and Google Analytics. Dpa journalists are informed daily by mail about content usage and Twitter Analytics. Several head-up-displays show online content usage by customers at the dpa newsroom. It is important to note that organizational culture plays an important role in determining how much access to audience data is permitted.

6 Conclusion

In this paper, I have explored the recent emergence of audience metrics at news agencies. This article has attempted to outline the different approaches newswires are now taking to integrate audience metrics into their newsgathering process. News agencies mainly focus on B2B customers, which is the reason why they are relatively late in the audience metrics game.

Audience metrics help to make editorial decisions, but news agencies stress the fact that they take data informed decisions, not data driven ones. Compared to other media organizations, several news agencies do not want to give their journalists full access to audience data.

News agencies have a broad customer base ranging from media companies (text, video, audio, photo, infographics) to financial institutions, other corporates and end users. That is why defining the right metrics is not an easy task.

Most of the newswire use free of charge Google Analytics for their B2B website or B2C news website. Big news agencies rely on more sophisticated tools like Chartbeat, Newswhip, or Parse.ly. Some home-grown tools are also in use to track news agency content online and in print.

In conclusion, this paper highlights three key points:

- Audience metrics can help news agencies to “reduce the waste” and encourage them to produce relevant and high impact content driving their business goals. Because of audience data, newsroom management can shift editorial resources temporarily or permanently to areas with high content demand and audience interest.
- Beside quantitative audience data there is still high attention on qualitative feedback from customers, measured in calls, e-mails and meetings. Qualitative and quantitative audience feedback has to be combined.
- News agencies need to link their audience metrics to editorial objectives. Some news agencies seem to experiment with generic analytics, not focusing on editorial analytics linking metrics to longer-term strategic decision making.

News agencies themselves are interested in finding out more about video and photo metrics. Also delivering news content driven by search data can be an interesting field for newswires.

Further research is needed to review the long-term effects of audience metrics on news agencies and editorial decision-making.

Metrics help newswires – the gatekeeper of the gatekeepers – to receive more feedback and learn more about their audience. Audience analytics represent the missing link between end users, news organization customers and news agencies.

Appendix: Interviewees

Person	Organization	Function	Date	Method
Froben Homburger	dpa	News chief	29. September 2016	In person
Christopher Weckwerth	dpa	Social Media Reporter	29. September 2016	In person
Tony Gillies	AAP	Editor in Chief	18. October	In Person
Sergey Sloutskov	TASS	Business Relationship Development Director,	16. November	Email Statement
Jim Kennedy	AP	SVP for Strategy and Enterprise Development	23. November	Telephone
Mark Davies	AP	Global News Manager	23. November	Telephone
Reg Chua	Reuters	executive editor for data and innovation	30. November	Telephone
Kakuya Ogata	Kyodo	managing director of the International Department	2. December	Telephone
Giacomo Vedovato	ANSA	Product Manager	5.Dezember	Email-Statement

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