AUDIENCE ENGAGEMENT WITH THE SPECIAL BROADCASTING SERVICE

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Media use is part of everyday life. Audience theory tells us media is social. It is understood through interpretation and interaction. Audiences draw on their own personal experiences, histories and identities in generating meaning out of television content. This presentation looks at general audience reaction to a SBS documentary Go Back To Where You Came From, and an in-depth audience analysis of Go Back To Where You Came From and Immigration Nation — both broadcast in 2011.

Documentaries provide resources for discussion about difficult and politicised issues. These resources are particularly important around ‘difficult subjects’ in a complex multicultural society. In a world overloaded with information, documentaries play a special role in concentrating discussion. When coupled with online user-generated content, audiences are able to engage in deep and complex discussions of issues.

Go Back To Where You Came From and Immigration Nation were aimed squarely at audiences as part of SBS’s goal to be a catalyst in the nation’s discussion about multiculturalism.

1. Analysis of the social media response to Go Back to Where You Came From

Go Back to Where You Came From was a multi-platform event:

- Three-part 60’ documentary on SBS ONE
- Online Portal: A comprehensive experience that collected all the key information about the series in an online space: a platform for discussion:
  - Your Say — moderated discussion
  - Schools resources
  - Simulation game
  - Episode catch-ups
- Facebook
- Twitter
- Outreach: Education Pack for all high schools, online curriculum aides
- One follow-up documentary, The Response, which brought the six participants back for discussion of the series.

Audience analysis

- Highly successful series for SBS
- Average viewing 854,000 per episode; 42% higher than Immigration Nation; 11.2% share of total viewing
- Broad audience with slightly more females
- Online success:
  - 221,000 unique browsers to sbs.com.au/goback/
310,000 stream views of Go Back in June +

52,000 YouTube downloads

- Successful social media campaign contributed to worldwide trend on Twitter during the night of the first broadcast
- Fantastic publicity outcomes, including coverage in the New York Times and the BBC.
- Strong government awareness

Social media results
- Go Back trended worldwide on first night to air (#GoBack)
- Go Back and The Response show generated 50,000 Tweets. Unprecedented for SBS — for both approach and results.
- 52,000 Go Back downloads from YouTube over a three week period
- Discussion peaked on air in Episode 2 but dialogue was consistent through to The Response show: 10,000 tweets across off air days Fri 24th–Mon 27th, indicating the show had heightened discussion and engaged audiences beyond immediate broadcast.
- Facebook: Go Back groups established independent to SBS — 35,000 friends
- 16% of younger people 18–34 found out about the show on Facebook and Twitter.
- SBS was purposefully impartial when it came to fuelling debate: i.e.: ‘Boat people: Criminals or heroes. Where do you stand?’

Key themes from the online discussion were overwhelmingly positive
- reaction to participant point of view (Raquel and Raye each trending worldwide)
- desire for politicians (Abbott, Gillard in particular) to be made aware of show
- grateful for the insight
- what can I do? How can I make a difference?
- shift in thinking with regard to ‘boat people’ — greater tolerance
- greater appreciation for the situation of asylum seekers & refugees
- the need to educate from ground up — discussion should be taken into schools.

Separate data analysis done by Datalicious, partnered with Alterian, to analysed Twitter traffic. Their analysis showed the twitter traffic mirrored the discussions happening online on the SBS website and Facebook page.

2. Audience research

SBS commissioned Entertainment Insights to explore audience reactions to Go Back To Where You Came From and Immigration Nation. Immigration Nation was a three-part documentary, more traditional in form with a mix of personal stories, archival footage, and expert commentary.

Focus groups included the perspective of:
- ex-asylum seekers,
- recently arrived migrants,
- long term migrants (products of postwar migration),
second generation Australians and
Anglo-Australians.

Key findings

*Go Back To Where You Came From* and *Immigration Nation* filled a knowledge gap for Australian audiences. The use of individuals’ stories to tell a bigger social political story was a key element in capturing many of the participants’ engagement with the program. The documentaries engaged people not just as viewers but also citizens as they reflected on Australia’s attitudes towards new arrivals to our shores.

**Raising a mirror to Australian attitudes on refugees**

*Go Back* not only put a face to the refugees, it also put a face on the ‘ordinary Australians’ and their views on asylum seekers and refugees. For the refugees we spoke to, the program shone a light on Australians’ attitudes to refugees. Discussion of the attitudes and responses of the six participants who took the program’s journey enabled audiences to debate the issue of asylum seekers and refugees. Predominantly, our focus group participants believed their opinions on the issues had shifted with new insights gained from the program. Many of the refugees in our groups were glad to see a program on Australian television that validated their experience to the general public. Individual refugees commented that they saw the impact of the show immediately in their private lives and how Australians treated them. One hoped it ‘might help me get a job now that people understand more’.

**Filling the knowledge gap about ‘our’ history**

*Immigration Nation* surprised its audience because it revealed an aspect of Australia’s past that has largely been untold. The program was perceived to have high educational value with a balanced and fair presentation of the story. The personal stories of real people affected by the White Australia Policy bought home the human impact of policy to the viewers. These stories were the key to emotional engagement with the information unfolding in the series.

**Immigration nation**

In our research, the migrants of the era depicted in the documentary claimed it validated their own personal experiences as migrants to Australia under the White Australia Policy. For younger viewers accustomed to multiculturalism, it gave them a newfound appreciation of their migrant parents and grandparents, or those of their friends and reaffirmed the importance of multiculturalism in Australian society. For both European and Asian migrants it sparked memories of a less tolerant Australia.

**SBS is definitely different**

SBS is seen to hold a distinctive place on the Australian media landscape. People turn to SBS for information they can trust and to ‘broaden their horizons’. A balanced point of view and an alternative perspective is expected. SBS is recognised as showing the real Australia in the programming and faces that it presents to the audience: with real stories about real people.

In addition to its documentaries and news on SBS, the entertainment it offers is described as quirky, edgy and raw without the ‘Hollywood touch’.
Introduction

This presentation explores the role of online media in the journey that an audience member takes when they attend an arts event. It identifies the key opportunities for arts organisations to maximise value from online media.

The idea for this research came from our arts participation survey More than Bums on Seats — where we found that many Australians are positive about the arts but don’t go much — and also that the internet is important to arts consumers for finding out about artists and arts events.

We put the customer at the heart of this research. We developed a model of the journey that a person takes when they attend an arts event. Starting with how they first find out about it, through to researching the event, booking tickets, planning and building excitement before the event, what they do during the event, and after the event.

These results are based upon a survey by Nielsen Online of 2,500 people who attended an art event in the previous year about their experience. They asked people to consider one type of arts event, and to tell us how they used the internet at each stage.

First I would like to explain what I mean by arts attendance. The arts are very difficult to define — and academic careers are built around exploring this subject alone. We took a pragmatic approach — and started with the main art forms that the Council funds: visual arts and crafts, theatre and dance, literature, festivals and live music. Then we developed this list of 22 different types of arts experiences. Including exhibitions in galleries or museums, dance performances outside of a theatre, writer’s festivals, and music gigs in bars.

The attendance journey

The stages where the internet was most heavily used were:

- **Research** — Finding out more about the event and deciding whether to attend:
  - three quarters use the internet to research the artist or event
  - search engines are the most popular way to seek information
  - videos, photos and audio give a taste of what to expect
  - online reviews and recommendations help with the decision.
Planning and building excitement — Anticipating the event and getting organised:

- almost three quarters use the internet at the planning stage
- ‘hyping up’ through video clips, photos and background on artists
- practical info like online journey planners, parking and restaurant offers are important
- mobile apps help to plan things on the go.

After the event — Reliving the experience and considering the next event:

- two thirds use the internet after the event
- sharing video and photos to relive the event
- talking with others and recommending the event
- planning the next event and purchasing tickets.

The opportunities

Our goal is to make this research useful to the arts sector. So we identified some key opportunities for arts organisations to pursue. I am going to lead you through four of these today:

- **Get their attention.** Most audiences don’t seek out information about arts events. We need to use memorable and enticing ways to promote events using a mix of old and new media.

- **Build word of mouth.** Social media provides unique opportunities to fuel the conversation about arts events.

- **Engage your audience.** Invite them behind the scenes, ask them what they think, and listen to what they say.

- **Enrich their experience.** Video content is a powerful way to give audiences a taste of something new. Mobile technology means audiences can access this content anywhere.

Get their attention

We asked people how they first found out about the arts event and discovered that the internet plays a role for four in ten people. However printed materials — the newspaper, brochures or fliers — are still the main sources of awareness. People tell us that they still like the luxury of glossy printed brochures for the coffee table — particularly older audiences.

It is interesting to see that word of mouth is the second most common source of initial awareness — with one in two finding out about events through friends, family and colleagues.

Outdoor advertising may play a bigger role in future — as mobile internet means people walking past a poster can immediately go online to find out more.
We found that e-newsletters are the most common online source of awareness for audiences of all ages. Overall, 20 percent of arts audiences find out about events through e-newsletters; mainly from ticket outlets, promoters, and venues. For young people e-newsletters are the main way to find out about arts events online, but this is very closely followed by Facebook.

**Build word of mouth**

One of the important things this study does is measure word of mouth. For the first time, we can see what conversations are occurring online, and where they are happening.

One in two people first found out about an arts event through word of mouth. We found that 55 percent of these people find out in person or on the phone, while 18 percent found out through email, and another 19 percent found out through social media. Young people rely more heavily on social media for recommendations about what to go and see than older people.

More than half of arts audiences used social media in relation to an arts event in the past 12 months. The key stages where they use social media are research, preparation, and after the event. We were surprised to see the extent of engagement after events — 46 percent of total arts audiences used social media after events to do things like share photos and reflect on their experience.

Facebook is the most widely used social media tool. Of those people who currently use social media in relation to attendance, most of these are using Facebook, followed by Youtube, online forums and blogs.

The Australian Ballet is a great example of the relevance of Facebook to their audience — with over 30,000 likes they have successfully brought their community online. When they put up a new photo on Facebook they see a spike in sales.

The results for Twitter are very different:

- Only one in four arts audiences have ever used Twitter, and half of those with a Twitter account no longer use it.
- Over half of arts orgs are on Twitter.

Whilst only a small group are actively using twitter to follow others, we know that the role of twitter extends well beyond the site, and into other channels. The mainstream news often reports on engaging Tweets, and it’s very common to see Twitter feeds on arts organisations website — which is the way to reach a wider audience.
Engage your audience

Audiences really want to engage with artists and event organisers online — before, during and after the event. They are looking to get to know the performers — rather than just to buy a ticket. They want to be able to do things like go backstage and have a chat with Director, or the costume designer. This is one of the main areas of future interest in the study, which indicates how audiences would like us to develop in future.

Enrich their experience

Today half of arts audiences have an internet capable mobile and almost everyone who doesn’t is intending to buy one. Apple is dominating the current market, and most future owners indicated Apple as the brand they are likely to buy.

At the moment a small number of all arts attendees are using the internet at events — but future interest is strong, particularly to:

- Discover more information about the event or artists
- Receive information from event organisers
- Engage with the creators or contribute to the event in some way.

A third of smartphone owners are already using apps for arts events. Among those who haven’t done it, there is strong interest in doing this in future.

There is significant untapped demand to use apps:

- To customise a program of events
- To interact at the event using purpose-built apps.

Video is powerful way of bringing the arts to life — particularly the performing arts.

There is a real opportunity to use video more effectively — and create appealing offline marketing that encourages the audience to go online. For example, on promotional flyers enticing people to visit the website to see video previews.

We create videos to promote our research results — and our Artists Careers video has had over 6,000 views on YouTube to date.
Communicating the research

One of the key challenges as a researcher is how to engage people with the results. A key feature of the communications campaign was ‘walking the talk’ by using social media and video effectively. In July we held seven face to face events around Australia to stimulate dialogue around the key findings and engage people with the opportunities. The #connectarts Twitter hashtag was actively used for live tweeting during the road show events.

- There were a total of 571 attendees at the road show.
- There were over 2,000 Tweets during the roadshow.
- The conversations during the road show forums trended in Sydney, Brisbane, Canberra and Adelaide.

The connect arts website was the centre for online engagement about the research, and featured the research reports plus the summary, case studies, blogs, and events.

In the first four weeks:

- The site had 4,684 unique visitors.
- There were 1,188 downloads of the reports.

A video to promote this research was created to appeal to younger arts marketing professionals and tells the story of social media through a love struck young man.

Watch this video out on our YouTube channel: [http://www.youtube.com/user/ozcoarts](http://www.youtube.com/user/ozcoarts).

Visit the connect arts website to download the full report: [http://connectarts.australiacouncil.gov.au](http://connectarts.australiacouncil.gov.au).