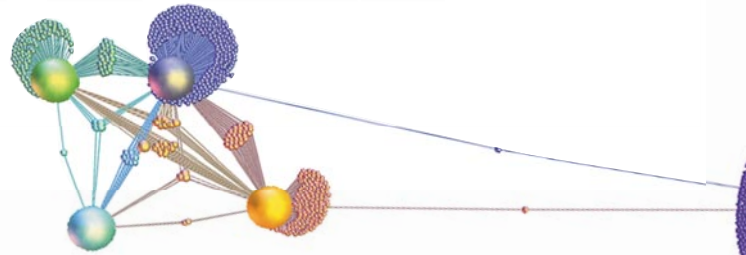


NETWORKED AUDIENCES



Global research consultancy **InterMedia** has offices in London, Washington DC and after 15 years of working throughout Africa also recently opened a regional office in Nairobi. For international broadcasters the need to engage with audiences remains unchanged but the rules of engagement are new. InterMedia COO **Susan Gigli** and **Dr. Ali Fisher** who directs their Networked Communication Research give a few pointers

The words of the late German poet-playwright apply to the challenge facing international broadcasters since InterMedia began helping many of them to gauge reach, engagement and impact 15 years ago. The need to engage with audiences through relevant content and appealing formats is unchanged, but the terrain of engagement has transformed as digital and mobile technologies proliferate and evolve. Strategies and research must adapt to this shifting landscape while still focusing on broadcasters' core activities.

How much have things changed digitally? In the past two decades, personal mobile devices have gone from 1G phones to 3G and 4G "smart devices". Between 2000 and 2008, Google's reach expanded from one billion indexed pages to one trillion. In the past seven years, Facebook amassed half a billion active users who spend roughly 700bn minutes combined on the site each month. 24 hours of video are added to Youtube servers every hour; Twitter users tally more than 5bn friendship relationships. Phew.

The challenge for all media

Because things are the way they are, they will not stay the way they are

Bertolt Brecht

Capitalise on the popularity of individuals to generate more interest in your brand

organisations is to embrace and benefit from these new platforms, where the keys to effective engagement are understanding how users behave and cluster within these networks, and how users are shaping their own news and information environments. Here are a few pointers for the digital road - ten new rules of engagement.

1. Recognise that meaningful engagement is through huge numbers of few-to-few interactions

In contrast to the traditional media model of "one to many," the digital terrain offers news-seekers the ability to filter and shape their daily news diet from among a multitude of sources. As a result, news-seekers tend to huddle in niches where they can confine their exposure to information that resonates with their world view.

For example, at one point following Iran's controversial 2009 election, individuals would have had to read three tweets a second on Twitter to keep up with all the online banter. But most individuals stuck to specific links and streams of conversation. Twitter activity was highly concentrated in just a few "clusters" that followed popular "nodes" of information.

2. Participate in user networks to generate loyalty

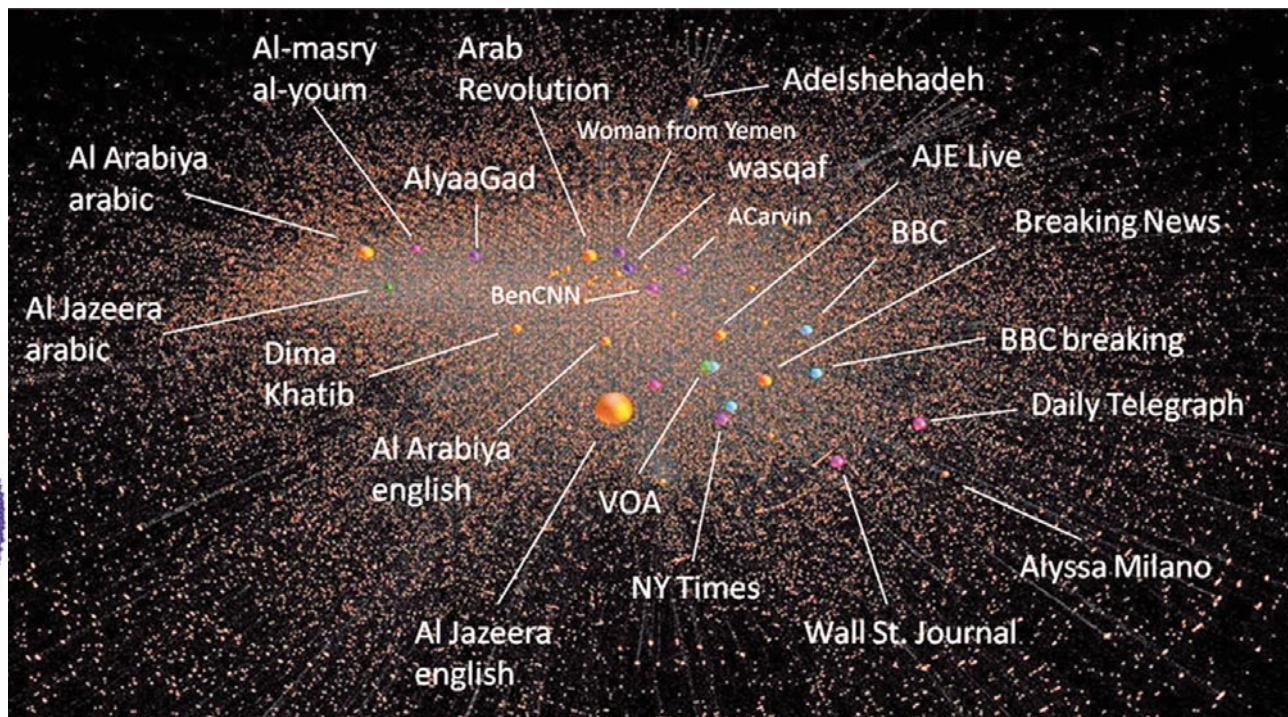
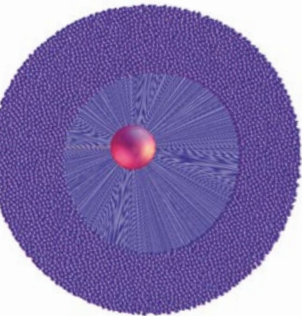
Successful media organisations must be participants in the digital information realm rather than only distant creators of it. Increasingly, engagement with news is on the terms and in the networks of the user. The value of the broadcaster is derived as much from the forums for expression it provides users as the content it delivers to this space.

3. Broaden conceptions of reach, motivation, response and impact to reflect the digital terrain

Complex multi-directional networks in the digital space call for tools that measure engagement in multiple directions. Measuring only reach or one-way dissemination will miss valuable insights about potential audiences and underestimate overall effectiveness. Meaningful measurement in the digital terrain must incorporate a broad range of user behaviours within searching, linking, sharing, commenting, co-creating, re-tweeting, and using offline word-of-mouth.

4. Move beyond geography as the standard for defining audiences

The location of a transmitter no longer defines the reach of broadcast content. The focus has



shifted from broadcasters deciding when, where and how to transmit content, to users deciding when, where and how to consume, share and create content. "Audience" profiles must include the position within a virtual communication network, not simply geographic coordinates.

5. Identify prominent producers, brokers and consumers of information

Participants fill various roles in the digital terrain. Some simply consume information, others produce it, and still others are key intermediaries - brokers, or nodes. They search for, splice, aggregate and comment on numerous streams of digital content to produce filtered feeds of information consumed by others.

Broadcasters can tap into brokers/nodes as a way to expand reach. However, broadcasters need to beware of the distortive effect that regurgitated and independently redacted content may have on perceptions of quality, accuracy and brand integrity.

6. Give "reciprocity" equal weight to reach

Critical to understanding effectiveness in the online sphere is analysing the reciprocal flows of information - whether it sparks online sharing and dialogue as opposed to simply being consumed. For example, the image visualizing Twitter activity during the wave of Middle East protests shows the relative importance of

information sources based on the degree to which others re-tweeted their content. In addition, nodes are close together if their content was re-tweeted by similar combinations of users. Identifying clusters of users sharing content may be more instructive for content producers to analyze than simply measuring in bulk the amount of information consumed - most of which is not widely shared.

7. View multilingual individuals as key connectors between languages and geographies

Access to content in multiple languages is now as simple as a few clicks. Multilingual individuals act as bridges between different single-language communities that previously did not readily commingle. These individuals are a mixed blessing - problematic for broadcasters wishing to segment messages to different communities, and valuable for those seeking broader content reach.

8. Propel journalists beyond reporting toward information brokering

Journalists, primarily responsible for producing content and information, can be much more active digitally - as instigators, moderators and drivers of the online discussion through blogs, videos, tweets and other means.

Broadcasters and other content producers can capitalize on the online presence and popularity of these individuals to generate more interest in the brand and attract

▲ Far left Iran: Post-election Twitter activity Above The Middle East discussion online

▼ From top Susan Gigli; Dr Ali Fisher

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more users. Research on information sharing during the Arab Spring revealed that journalists such as Dima Khatib of Al Jazeera, CNN's Ben Wedeman and Andy Carvin of U.S. National Public Radio achieved this status.

9. Tap into the extensive networks of celebrities

Celebrity sells. This is not news to broadcasters, but some are not migrating this practice online. The millions of Twitter followers amassed by some celebs attest to their online clout, exemplified in our Arab Spring research by the presence of actor Alyssa Milano as a fairly prominent player in the Twitter galaxy. Apparently her combination of celebrity and protest-related missives were a potent information mix.

10. Strive to retain users' trust as they increasingly turn to their own networks for advice and guidance

Social media is causing a fundamental shift in people's attitudes toward news and news-producing organizations. Individuals use social networks not only as filters to cope with information overload, but also as evaluators of the quality and trustworthiness of information.

Once again, international broadcasters need to be aware of the influentials who are arbiters of quality and trust, and to respond swiftly when the quality or trustworthiness of your content is questioned. ■