

Digital Consumer Concerns

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We Take A Look At Consumer Concerns Around Our Ever Changing Digital World

In the hyper fast world of digital, we all know that things are constantly changing. The extraordinary pace of change we've faced in the UK's digital media landscape over the past few years has certainly not gone without its fair share of public concerns.

A recent survey of 1,107 respondents conducted by MediaCom North's Real World Insight team set to find out just how much of a concern the digital world is for Brits.

There are millions of children and teens using social networking and video sharing sites. The time when a 9pm TV watershed was enough to shield young eyes from inappropriate or offensive content is long gone.

At the same time, the internet, once seen as a tool that would open up the world to each and every one of us, has become a way for each and every one of us to be opened up to the world. Increasingly, the price consumers are being asked to pay for connectedness and convenience is their privacy; and it's being brought to their attention more and more with news headlines around privacy issues.

Results from this study reveal a level of disquiet amongst Brits' regarding their current attitudes towards online advertising and data privacy.

Our research found that just under half (46%) of consumers say they feel the way that companies can gather data about them is getting out of control, and a further 37% feel that online advertising invades their privacy. Similarly, only 1 in 10 would agree that they have control over what information is gathered and held by online organisations and just 9% of Brits like the fact that online advertising is personalised to them.

Much of the concern, according to the results, is being driven by older consumers. For example, the number who feel that data gathering is getting out of control rises from 46% overall to 54% of those aged 45+, and even higher to 64% of the over 65s. In fact, we see quite a polarized view on the issues between the oldest and youngest age groups where, in some cases, the level of agreement with the more negative statements amongst those aged 65+ is almost double that of the 18-24s.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, younger individuals see more of the positives in online advertising – with those aged 18-24 (17%) being significantly more likely than the rest of the population (9%) to enjoy personalised online ads – and it would appear to be rubbing off on parents, too. Results from the survey showed that, generally, those without children are more concerned about the issues than those with children – and, conversely, parents showed a more positive attitude towards such things. In particular, respondents who have older children aged 11-18 (19%) are more than twice as likely as those without children (8%) to say they feel in control over the information online organisations can gather and hold.

There's a suggestion here, then, that the closer and more engaged consumers are with the

online world plays a key role in helping them feel in control over what information they're sharing – whether that be because they're tech savvy themselves, because they're parents whose teenagers keep them up to speed with all things digital, or parents of younger children who are well practiced in trying to filter the online content to which their children are exposed. On the other hand, those who are perhaps more distant from technology and maybe don't use it as often as others – e.g. the over 65s – are likely to be unfamiliar with things such as targeted ads and, as a result, see them more as an invasion of privacy than a convenience.

It isn't just a lack of familiarity that is fueling concern, though. As well as half the population thinking that data gathering is out of control, less than 1 in 10 Brits (8%) think that online advertising is sufficiently regulated – and this figure, unlike others, does not significantly increase amongst younger audiences. With high profile cases such as ads being misplaced next to extremist content and Logan Paul's infamous YouTube video all occurring within one year, it's maybe no surprise that so few people see the industry as one that is tightly regulated.

But, what do consumers think should be done about such issues? Well, more than half (55%) of respondents believe that companies need to be open and transparent about the information they gather, and this figure rises to more than two in three of those most concerned, the over 65s (69%). In terms of a 'consumer solution' to improving online advertising and content, low levels of trust in current regulations would suggest that a stronger focus on the policing of online advertising could help revive Brits' trust in the industry.

From an advertiser point of view, these figures are quite striking and show us a clear picture of what we should be doing to ensure our audiences are more trusting and in control of online advertising. Whilst, for companies such as ourselves, personal data is obviously something that allows us to produce such well targeted advertising – we need to remember that while consumers are willing to volunteer personal information in return for a more streamlined and customized experience, what they don't know *can* hurt them or, at least, damage the trust they have in companies and brands.

Online as a channel provides incredible opportunities to communicate with consumers creatively and with laser precision. It is evident, though, that as an industry there is a need to reassure consumers, particularly in the later lifestages, that responsible online advertising is as much a benefit to them as it is to brands.

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