March 2024

audience research methods:

a resource pack

#LOCALMEDIA4DEMOCRACY

IMS

European Commission

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Introduction

This document is designed to be a short guide to a selection of audience research methods outlined and explored in our Local Media for Democracy workshops (November 9th and November 16th, 2023, and March 12th and 19th 2024). These sessions were designed to be a broad introduction to approaches that publishers can undertake and integrate into their day-to-day activities. This collection should be seen as starting point. One that can be built and developed as Local Media for Democracy moves forward, and as you as participants share you own case studies and examples. Before we look at each of the methods in turn, some general points are worth highlighting.

What is your research question?
Before engaging with any audience research method, understanding what you need to know and why is critical. Each method has distinct strengths, but also weaknesses. By defining a research question, you can then identify which method and methods are best suited to answer it.

Methods offer different outputs and limitations
Each methodological approach offers specific advantages and insights, but also limitations. When publishers are considering their audience research work, understanding which individual or combination of approaches can meet your needs is an important consideration. A reference table, produced by Reforge, can be found at the end of this document to assist in identifying a useful method for your own needs.

How does it connect with editorial and/or revenue generation strategies?
Actionable research findings are essential in realising strategic aims. Research in isolation may be interesting, but audience research that is aligned with organisational aims has utility and the potential for real-world impact.

Things Change
As some of the examples included in this document show, things change. Markets, audience preferences, needs and opinions, operating conditions, demographics as well as organisational capacity and strategies shift and evolve over time. This means that audience research can sometimes have a shelf-life or may become less relevant. As such, a core recommendation is to work towards making audience research into a standard and normal part of a publisher's operations. This pack details essential components of eight audience research methods:

- online surveys
- a/b testing
- 1-2-1 interviews
- focus groups
- personas
- observations
- design sprints
- co-creation and participatory design

The final section covers 'triangulation' and outlines how Latvian publisher Chayka used and uses a range of methods as part of an editorial and 'product' development process. Each method is accompanied by a short introduction, a description of potential ways to conduct the approaches, the positives and limitations it offers and links to further resources. The sections also include working examples and case studies to show how these approaches are used in practice. General resources are included in the final section.

We hope you find this document a useful resource.

John Mills
Archen Innovate

ONLINE SURVEYS

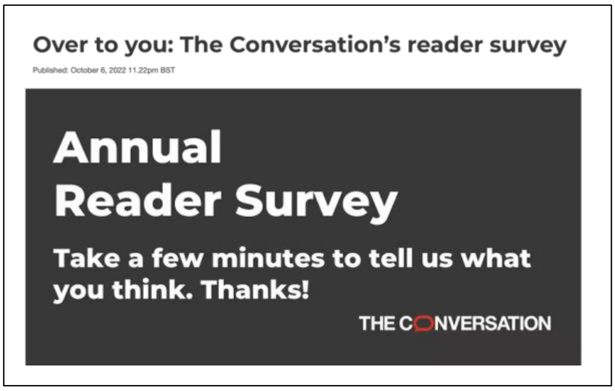
Intro

Online surveys can be used in a range of different ways and for different purposes. Expansive reader surveys can collect data on broad content preferences, audience demographic data, create insights into new product development and better understand what value existing users take from an editorial product.

Types of surveys

Comprehensive reader surveys

Spanning qualitative and quantitative feedback, a comprehensive reader survey allows publishers to collect a reem of deep information relating to their audience and their preferences. Each year, the Conversation Australia runs a broad exercise to deep dive into their readers perceptions. Misha Ketchell, editor at the Conversation, explains the core purpose for this approach is underpinned by their need to deliver a product that is relevant and useful to their readers.



We consult with our audience about what they want, what they don't want, what their thoughts, what their ideas are. And then we try to make sure we listen to them and report back to our audience that we've heard what they've said and the ideas that we're going to follow up. And some of the ones that maybe we're not because of resources or because it was a priority or whatever, just to try to keep us honest and accountable to our audience.

Misha Ketchell, editor, The Conversation Australia

Subscription / cancellation surveys

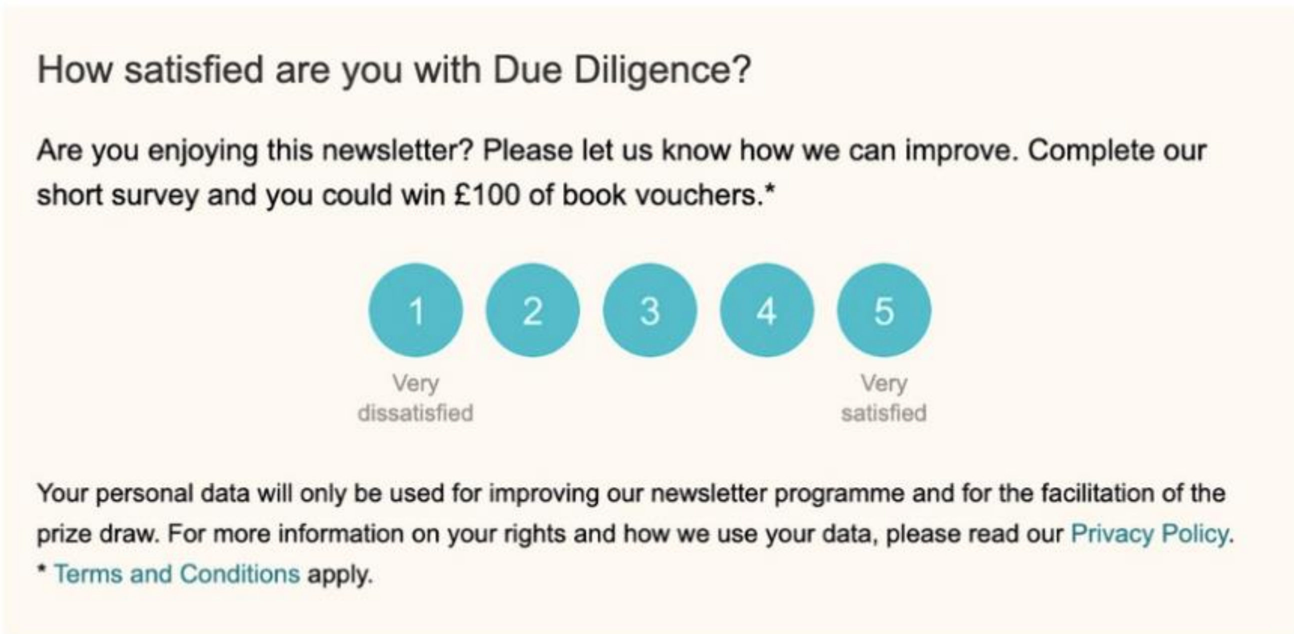
Shaw Media – a family-owned operation in Illinoisan and Iowa, US, implemented a survey at the point where subscribers cancelled their account. Localmedia.org reports that this survey allowed them to identify the key reason for cancellation: *price*. The team's response was to focus on value: creating a dedicated newsletter for subscribers. Ben Draper, digital subscriptions director, told the Local Media Association using this approach prompted a focus on onboarding and to *demonstrate* the value of subscription.

Content / editorial generation surveys

A range of publishers are using surveys to enable their audiences to contribute to editorial development. Asking users what content types/stories they would like to see covered ensures that newsrooms are catering for their community's unique needs. There are many examples of publishers engaging with this approach. Misha Ketchell, editor at the Conversation, describes their survey as a further consideration is that though asking your audiences 'what do you want', it also provides an opportunity for publishers to communicate their own values and the importance they place on their audience's perspective. Journalism.co.uk's final question in their reader survey stresses 'Please share. We listen'.

Content feedback surveys

Publishers also use short surveys to monitor how individual pieces of content or content categories are performing. The FT implemented a short Likert scale question at the end of its Due Diligence Newsletter, which then created an opportunity for a longer survey that was incentivised with a £100 book voucher. The data captured from this process allowed the teams to understand what the general perceptions of the product was and how it could be improved.



Positives

By using short or comprehensive reader surveys (or something in the middle), publishers could benefit by:

- Supporting/justifying and generating content choices over the short, medium and long-term
- Plugging existing data gaps
- Validating editorial choices and treatments
- Assisting and developing audience engagement and retention
- Supporting product development

Limitations and challenges

Despite some of the advantages listed above, there are drawbacks and/or limitations to surveys.

Limited reach: distributing on websites, newsletters and social media subscribers only allows you to capture information from **existing audiences.** If a core requirement of audience engagement and research is to expand into new areas, surveys hosted on your own platforms are of limited value.

Quality: like a sausage machine, the standard of your questions will dictate the quality and reliability of the responses. Avoid leading questions, ones that assume a position or any that are attempting to influence the response in a positive / negative way. Open-ended questions allow you to acquire context and qualitative insights from any quantitative data you generate.

Meaning: unpicking and interpreting qualitative responses, and correlating data can be a challenge. Ensure that your surveys are easily understandable to avoid people mis-interpreting the question. Also take care not to interpret the results partially.

Engagement: some publishers have walked back the use of immediate reader surveys the dual reason of user experience and quality of information that can be mined. Essentially, audience surveys are seen by some as harming users' experience of the content for little gain. One example is Reach in the UK:

> *"Questionnaires were an engagement killer. People just got turned off — it ruined the experience.... As a rule, we don't do that any more because people just fill in a load of nonsense."*
>
> *Jim Mullen, CEO at Reach*
> *Source: FT.com*

Key takeaways

With a range of different implementation approaches, surveys can generate a wide range of actionable insights. Ranging from immediate content preferences to in-depth and nuanced data on audience behaviours, preferences, underpinning values and demographics. Although tied to existing audiences, they can also help future product development and innovation efforts by asking audiences what needs they have that are currently unmet.

Further resources

Nielson Norman Group: writing good survey questions. *This is an excellent overview of how to create unbiased, effective and meaningful surveys. A good place to start...*

How to Run Surveys at Every Stage of the Design Cycle – Nielson Norman Group

Localmedia.org outlines: how 5 US publishers created value from implementing reader surveys

A/B testing

Intro

A well-trialled and extensively used method throughout digital publishing, A/B testing allows publishers to test variations of content and how they perform with their audiences. This provides a focus on understanding how layout and design, language choice, tone, style, length and calls to action appeal (or not) to users. Available through a wide variety of CMS systems and social media platforms, a/b testing allows for a micro-focus on engagement and user experience.

Many examples (including those below) assume a digital environment, but a/b testing can also be done in person, creating a to ask *why users are responding in the way they are*. Madeleine White, editor-in-chief at Paris-based The Audiencers and Head of International at membership and subscription platform Poool, has kindly provided a range of examples in this section. Broadly, she describes A/B testing as:

> *[One] of the most user friendly, but most valuable strategies for optimizing your performance. And it can go so in-depth in terms of you can a/b test within a very targeted audience segment. So, say we want to test your most engaged reader segment who are on mobile and in the UK. So that's a very targeted audience. And given that we know that no two audiences are the same, this kind of deep analysis and testing of very specific user groups helps us to understand how they behave and how they're different and how we can adapt messaging accordingly.*

What is a/b testable?
There's a wide variety of variables that can be tested as part of an a/b process.

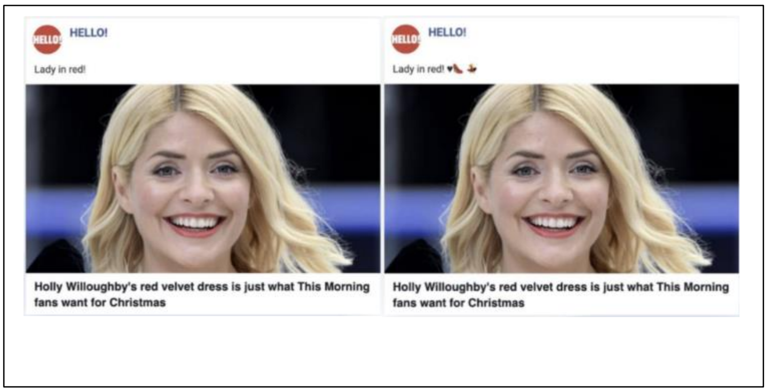
Headline testing: understand how length, tone, style, punctuation affect click-through rates.

Calls to action: if you're looking to drive traffic to specific pages or sections, engage readers in an editorial campaign, subscription drive, community activism and mobilisation, understanding the

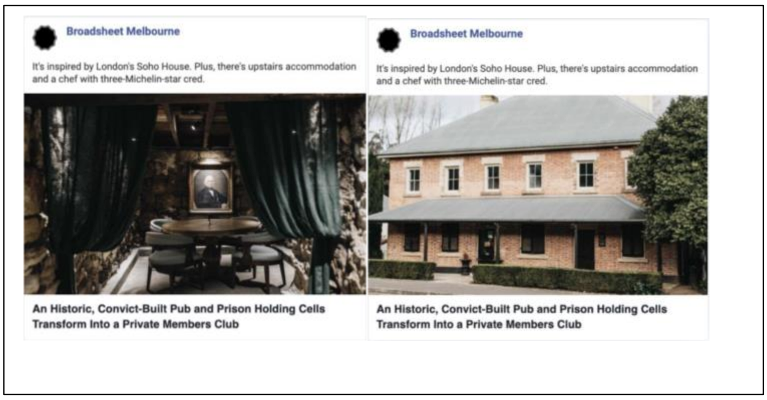
Figure 1: NEOS KOSMOS found option b provided a 16% subscription rise

phrasing, placement or priority of the call to action is key. A/b testing allows you to experiment with CTAs to find the most effective approach. [Poool] and [The Audiencers] website offer a range of examples demonstrating how shifting language and design has a tangible impact. Australian-Greek publisher NEOS KOSMOS experimented different subscription boxes, particularly the value proposition – option b provides a more 'support our work approach'. The results saw a 16% higher rate of subscriptions when the publisher's values were placed at the heart of a subscription campaign.

To emoji or not emoji: [Echobox] highlights Hello magazine's experiments with whether the use of emojis had any tangible impact on content consumption and click through via Facebook. The post text, image and headline remained the same. In the corrupted words of Shakespeare, to emoji or not emoji, that is the question.

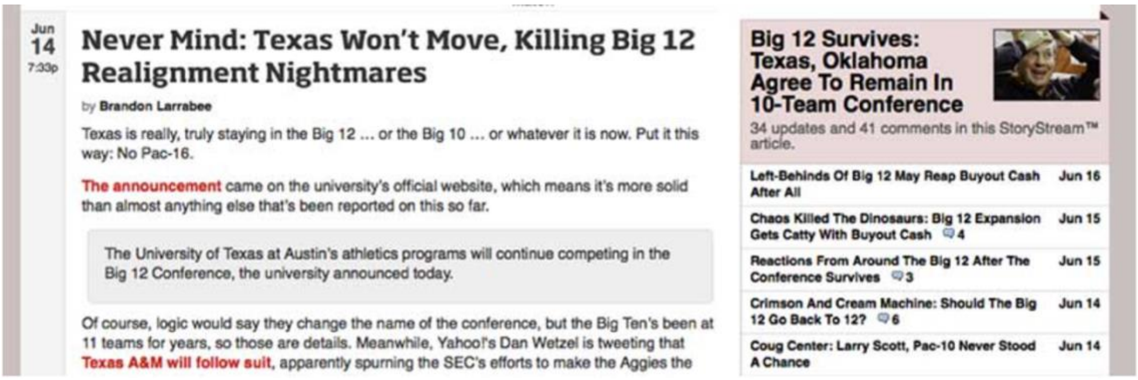


Images: critical to digital media, images convey meaning and tone more quickly and more effectively than words. Simply put, images don't need reading. Testing images can support editorial teams in understanding exactly how their audiences respond to visual design. A useful example is again provided by Echobox, demonstrating how Broadsheet Melbourne was able to understand which image of a renovated prison was converted into a private members club.



User journeys: a further example provided by Poool is for a/b to contribute to the effectiveness of user-journeys. Understanding how users pass through subscription, membership, linked content and other assets in a digital space can provide vital insights to what users respond most effectively to. The newsletter campaign provided by ELLE sought to improve registration effectiveness. In this example, a soft registration step (i.e. the collection of email) was removed as this was seen to generate higher drop-off rates.

Design: Although moving away from specific content or workflow examples, a/b testing can also be used to explore a variety of visual and interactive designs. This old example outlined by [Knightlab] from Vox Media shows an experiment where unread, collected articles were highlighted. The results showed no change in how users interacted with the content, and therefore the design/UX wasn't adopted.


Jun 14 7:33p

Never Mind: Texas Won't Move, Killing Big 12 Realignment Nightmares

by Brandon Larrabee

Texas is really, truly staying in the Big 12 ... or the Big 10 ... or whatever it is now. Put it this way: No Pac-16.

The announcement came on the university's official website, which means it's more solid than almost anything else that's been reported on this so far.

> The University of Texas at Austin's athletics programs will continue competing in the Big 12 Conference, the university announced today.

Of course, logic would say they change the name of the conference, but the Big Ten's been at 11 teams for years, so those are details. Meanwhile, Yahoo!'s Dan Wetzel is tweeting that Texas A&M will follow suit, apparently spurning the SEC's efforts to make the Aggies the

Big 12 Survives: Texas, Oklahoma Agree To Remain In 10-Team Conference

34 updates and 41 comments in this StoryStream™ article.

Left-Behinds Of Big 12 May Reap Buyout Cash After All	Jun 16
Chaos Killed The Dinosaurs: Big 12 Expansion Gets Catty With Buyout Cash 4	Jun 15
Reactions From Around The Big 12 After The Conference Survives 3	Jun 15
Crimson And Cream Machine: Should The Big 12 Go Back To 12? 6	Jun 14
Coug Center: Larry Scott, Pac-10 Never Stood A Chance	Jun 14

Positives

- Targeted and actionable data on the efficacy of content, layout and design across multiple platforms (mobile, web, social)
- Creates a 'live feed' of content preferences
- Related ability to increase a range of content interactions and connect with revenue generation or other impact measures

Limitations

If deploying a/b testing, it's important to note its limitations and weaknesses.

Insights relate to existing audiences: a/b testing can only be applied to existing traffic. This is useful if a publisher wants to increase interaction (and potentially within a specific demographic and/or product) but understanding new communities and markets is limited.

The why? *isn't explained*: although reasons behind the results of a/b testing can be inferred, the method doesn't supply the reasons behind content performance. Users may make certain decisions / exhibit interactions for a wide variety of reasons.

Impressions and not engagement: a risk of a/b testing, is that it can help maximise immediate interactions, but that doesn't necessarily guarantee content engagement. Understanding what makes audience click, doesn't always guarantee that content will be in line with needs and expectations.

Key takeaways

A/b testing – of a range of content elements and components – can by a vital tool in understanding audience preferences. This, in turn, can generate higher levels and engagement, and resultant benefits to subscriptions, memberships and revenue. Further methods to accompany a/b testing include multivariate testing.

It does have limitations, mainly around being tied to existing users and not revealing the underpinning explanations behind content choice.

Further resources

The Audiencers – how Netflix a/b tests dynamically

Echobox: the ultimate guide to a/b testing

Harvard Business Review – a refresher on a/b testing

15 of the Best A/B testing tools

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1-2-1 INTERVIEWS

Intro

A research approach that moves away from a purely digital sphere is 1-2-1 interviews with users – both current and potential, and other key stakeholders. A long-held approach withing product design and marketing, sometimes called user or empathy interviews, this simple yet effective approach to audiences is potentially under-utilised from journalism's perspective. Product thinking and design thinking – with its increasing prominence within the industry - highlights 1-2-1 interviews as a key approach to understanding audience needs, requirements, feedback and responses to content, product, revenue streams and wider values. Through identifying early adopters, 1-2-1 interviews can also allow you to generate initial and validation data on new products and services.

Opportunities

Empathy / user 1-2-1s are an excellent way to gauge an individual's thoughts and feelings on:

- Overall perceptions of the publisher and its output
- Specific products, stories, market positioning (both current and proposed)
- Potential for or limitations of revenue streams/business models
- Adoption of a new working process or structure (internal)
- Imagining alternative approaches and what products might be or potential stories or campaigns

More broadly, they can offer insights into more general patterns or themes from audiences or lead users that can assist with a range of editorial or commercial activities.

Examples

Chayka engaged with a range of users and potential users in two phases. A short sample of 20 interviews and a wider sample, conducted with an external agency, to interview 360 audience members to dive deep into behaviours and media preferences. This data and the insights it offered are still used by the newsroom several years after the research as a tool and benchmark. The interviewers were also leveraged by the external agency to produce a range of user personas that the newsroom could use to guide editorial decisions of if and how to cover certain stories or themes.

Journalism.co.uk\ are currently beginning a 1-2-1 interview process to understand their own user requirements. Their regular conference – newsrewired – is being used as an opportunity to directly engage with their readers to ask them for a range of feedback on the content and services it offers. This approach allows the publisher to maximise contact and demonstrate that it proactively trying to engage with its readers.

St Helens Star: based in the north-west of England, the editor of the St Helens Star used 1-2-1 interviews within his own team to monitor the impact of and responses to a change in editorial strategy. This approach allowed a deep dive into what a changing and evolving content strategy meant for the editorial team, and to extract key learnings from the process.

Considerations

When planning 1-2-1 interviews, considering the following factors could help the overall quality of the research and data it generates.

Understand purpose: good empathy interviews can have a flexible structure but are based around fulfilling a core need. They should be convened and directed towards answering specific questions or plugging knowledge gaps.

Sample: who you are speaking to is often as critical as what you're asking about. Are you approaching existing audiences, new audiences, certain demographics or platform users?

Sample size: interviews are time consuming to arrange, structure, conduct and analyse. Too small a number and you will not get the breadth to accompany the depth of the interview itself. Too large and you'll exhaust resource for a degree of repetition. Consider what is reasonable to conduct with the resource you have.

Keep flexible / keep disciplined: as in journalism, the joy of 1-2-1 interviews is that you can be flexible and 'follow your nose' – exploring themes and topics as they emerge. **But** don't lose sight of the overall objectives the interviews are being conducted for.

Incentives: why should people talk to you? Consider offering incentives (vouchers, tickets, payment) to enable people to justify their own involvement. Offering a thank you can increase numbers, but the risk is that people will be tempted to tell you what you want to hear.

Analyse for themes and patterns: one trap is to lean on direct quotes or specific 'things' people tell you. This can be useful but take the time out to look for themes and patterns. 'Coding' – identifying broad themes and trends – will make your analysis more rigorous. More information on coding is included in the Further Resources list at the end of this document.

Positives

As mentioned above, 1-2-1 offer distinct positives:

- Allow you to 'go-deep' into an issue and generate rich data: 1-2-1s can help to explain the *why* of an issue
- Take direct feedback and thoughts from the community you are looking to work with
- Flexibility on subjects and topics
- Skills set required are very close to standard journalistic activity

Limitations

Resource: Before embarking on interviews as a research tool, it's worth acknowledging that they can be time consuming, involve only a small cross-section of your audience and require a level of analysis to extract full value. For post project, campaign or any other evaluation, individuals may not be able to recall precise information or reflections.

Bias: interviews – both the interviewee and the interviewer – can have a specific bias towards a view or position. This doesn't necessarily invalidate the interview in question or interviews more generally as a research method. Rather, understanding that bias may be present and to recognise bias and its potential influence on the data is key. Any inferences taken from the data will therefore have this limitation baked in.

Further resources

[Google Ventures: how to conduct a user interview]

[Interaction Design Foundation product interview guidance]

FOCUS GROUPS

Intro

A method used frequently in a range of context – from political analysis to product testing, focus groups allow for a collective discussion of key themes and areas, involving audiences and potential audiences, and other key stakeholders. The leader/facilitator of the session suggests questions or topics for discussion, gently guiding the conversations but, often, allowing them to develop organically.

How can they be used?

There's a wide variety of use-cases around focus groups – and too many to go into depth here. However, in summary, they provide opportunities to go deep into specific question or issue, and capture a range of perspectives. They echo some of the functions offered by interviews, and can be harnessed to:

- Content preferences and perceptions (individual stories / editorial campaigns, strategic direction)
- Early-stage validation/feedback of new or novel content / business / product
- Perspectives on commercial opportunities / plans
- Demographic data on audiences (ability to cross reference with content preferences)

Further to these practical considerations,

- Contribute to other audience research tools - personas
- Demonstrate and contribute to editorial values and culture
- Forge a dialogue between audiences and publishers

Case studies

SenseMaker: as part of the SenseMaker project, run by UCLan and the Manchester Evening News/Reach, focus groups were used as part of a wider range of audience research methods. The project sought to develop new sensor packs that would help journalists and communities collect data to support storytelling. This data could span air quality, noise levels, thermal imaging and image analysis, mobile signal strength and many others. The challenge was knowing which issues were of most importance to community members and journalists. The project team ran a combination of methods to dig deep into what issues were of most relevance to communities and how sensor data could help shed new light upon them. The benefits were to help the team select issues to work on, and to understand the 'whys'. This information was then used in the creation of concepts.

Considerations

There are a number of elements to consider before embarking on focus groups:

- Time and skills / knowledge to deliver and analyse focus groups (themes, patterns, critical appraisal)
- Participant incentives / payments – is this something you want to introduce to generate participant numbers?
- Complex, contentious or controversial subjects may raise specific challenges – planning and preparation are key in advance to ensure topics are presented effectively. If you consider your research question to be challenging, considering taking advice or commissioning market or academic researchers.
- Each group is unique and often develops a rhythm – moving through the conversation. This means the facilitator often prompts and nudges the discussion, rather than chair or lead.

Positives

As with other 'qualitative' methods, Focus Groups can enable you to understand the *why?* Offering a deep dive into a certain topic or theme with key users or stakeholders. It also allows you to get direct feedback on product ideas, story themes or treatments and revenue streams or other commercial questions. Positives include:

- Rich data from a group of key individuals
- Opportunity to 'stress test' an editorial or commercial idea
- To gather insights from key demographic or better understand the perspectives of multiple demographic groups on the same issue

Limitations

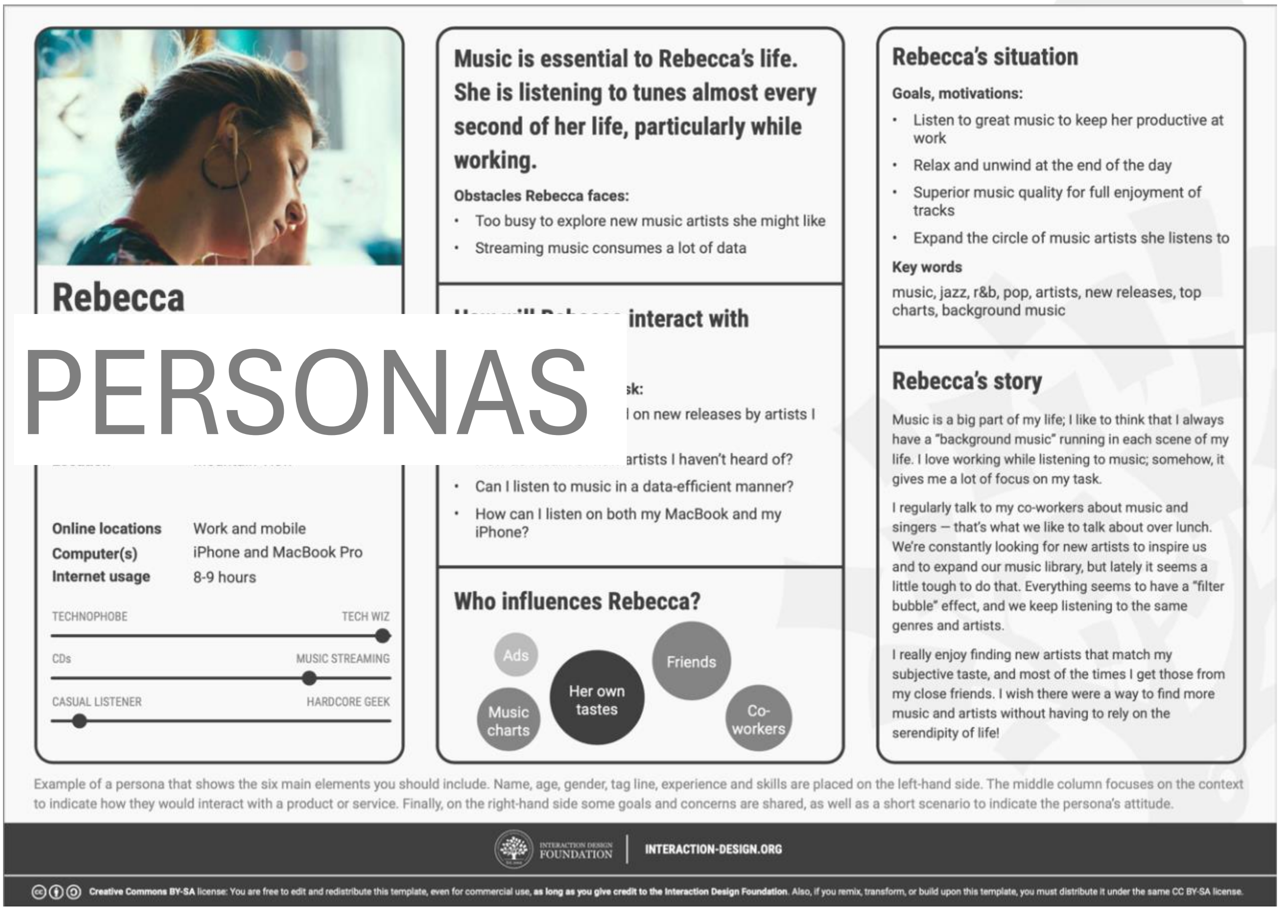
- Group think: conversations can become an echo chamber, or even become affected by a minority of dominant voices/perspectives. The challenge is to avoid false consensus based on a sealed conversation
- Mis-direction / mis-interpretation: facilitator doesn't generate high-quality insights around the core question or the data isn't interpreted correctly following the session
- ROI: the value doesn't outweigh the time and effort

Further resources

How to Conduct Focus Groups – Interaction Design Foundation

The Use and Misuse of Focus Groups – Nielsen Norman Group

PERSONAS



Intro

Although not a research tool in their own right, personas are used in multiple sectors by product teams to better understand their target audience. Using research data – generated through methods mentioned elsewhere within this document – can assist with both 'imagining' user needs and generating editorial or commercial responses to them. They are focussed on generating empathy with a representative user/audience member, and any decisions relating to editorial or product can be informed by them. This connection to empathy, also demonstrates how personas are closely affiliated with Design Thinking, and the process it advocates.

Case studies

#thisistucson

Launched as a new product from the Arizona Daily Star, #thisistucson was driven by a need to cater for a focused demographic. The editorial team, led by Irene McKisson, generated a key persona that they wanted to reach – Jessica. Jessica was an amalgamation of research data that spanned survey responses and 1-2-1 interviews. Details included content likes and dislikes, leisure activities and motivations. The persona influenced editorial decision making and product development, and helped the publication to grow newsletter subscriptions, general website traffic and impact – with audiences acting on recommendations or reviews.

CityDog

Minsk city digital magazine CityDog developed personas based on audience data from its website and social media pages, online surveys, 1-2-1 interviews and editorial team brainstorms. The magazine wanted to expand its audience from 25-35 years old urban creative class to older city residents and serve as a platform connecting different generations. The team used audience segmentation method, where circle zero represents the core target audience, circle one includes the closest people in life of the key persona, circle two is next in influence, etc. CityDog created three personas and adjusted the content policy accordingly: 60% of the content designed for the key persona from circle zero (young woman, 30-35 years old), 30% for circle one (young man, 30-35 years old), and 10% for circle two (active seniors). The portraits (real people representing each audience circle, who were featured in CityDog) with the summaries of three personas were printed out and posted on the walls of the newsroom as reference points for editorial content planning meetings. As a result, CityDog saw a 20% increase in 55+ years old readers from Minsk on its website in six months after creating personas and adopting audience segmentation approach in content policy.

Chayka

Formed through focus groups, 1-2-1 interview research – spanning over 360 individuals, Chayka used an external agency to conduct the research and create audience personas. These, according to co-founder Natalja Paļčevska, were useful in relation to understanding audience requirements and shaping editorial content. However, the publisher – a Russian speaking outlet in Latvia – generated two personas, but the relevancy of these personas reduced over time due to changing real-world events. These included both Covid 19 and the war in Ukraine. As such, Chayka is now looking at revised personas to ensure their continued relevancy.

Considerations

- Background research & time and skills: resource is needed to conduct data gathering and construction of useful personas
- A willingness to try personas within an editorial context

Opportunities

- Create and validate user-centered concepts (editorial and commercial)
- User-first approach: assist with working *for* audiences of various demographics: potentially not represented in the newsroom
- Engage positively with audiences during the research phase

Limitations

- Sampling: personas are only as good as the data that underpins them
- Fallibility: old or mis-directed personas can offer flawed responses
- Time-consuming: organizing, conducting and analysing isn't a quick process

Further resources

[Personas – A simple introduction]() – Interaction Design Foundation

[Personas]() – study guide – Nielson Norman Group

OBSERVATION

Intro

Observations can be a vital tool in understanding audience behaviours and preferences. Simply watching people interact with digital products in person or via analytic / eye tracking software can offer a range of data on usability and content effectiveness. Studies can range from expansive studies into usability or simply asking people to use a product and feedback directly.

Types of observations
There are a range of contexts and scenarios where observations can be carried out. Each requires a different level of resource and expertise to both conduct and analyse content and product.

Conversational: simply going out and talking to people about your product, editorial angle or campaign – showing examples and allowing users to navigate can offer a wealth of data and insights that might not occur within the newsroom.

Controlled observation: testing products in a 'lab environment' – i.e. a more controlled environment and have people observe from another room can allow for more precise research design. Large organisations conduct these usability tests, but small publishers can also adopt this model by simply setting up a test room and camera. One or two testers can sit in the room with a user while others observe and listen. This approach is also a facet of the final day of a design sprint.

Digital tools: in additional to analogue approaches, publishers can also take advantage of digital methods. Analytic data and heat mapping can demonstrate how users navigate your website, and more advance eye tracking software can be used to understand user-hot spots. However, this on its own won't always provide the why.

Case studies

#thisistucson used observation as a quick validation tool when developing a new newsletter product. Irene McKisson explains:

> *We actually took the prototype of the newsletter out to people and showed them and had them walk through it with us. This led to us changing the newsletter significantly. We had decided to make the newsletter "frictionless" so that nobody had to click through to get to anything. But the first people we showed it to said 'urgh, this is so long', and we watch them just slide through the whole thing not reading anything, which led us to add headers and breaks. We added a lot of wayfinding and emojis and ways to break up the text and make it easier to read.*

She highlights that this is a small example of "how talking to someone about your news product might change the outcome".

NewsThings: a key aim of this university-industry collaboration was to understand *how, why and where* users consumed news. It was also important for the team to move beyond analytic data as this was limited within the focus of the project – the Internet of Things. As such, we asked volunteers, made up of audience and non-audience members, to take pictures of them and others consuming news. This gave us insights into the physical and social locations where people encountered, shared or discussed news and information. It led to a central finding that news was shared beyond digital and that audiences are surrounded by news and information at all points of the day and in many contexts. This led the team to think about personalisation and how to personalise news content.

Considerations

- Time and skills / knowledge to deliver and analyse (themes, patterns, critical appraisal)
- Sample size: publishers may not require huge sample sizes when asking users for feedback on digital products. The Nielsen Norman Group suggests that 80% to 85% of bugs can be discovered with as little as five testers. Read more here
- Careful planning and preparation: are you testing 'in the wild' or in controlled conditions.

Opportunities

- Direct feedback on a concept, story or product
- Ability to get user feedback at every point of the design process
- Engage positively with audiences and start / continue constructive dialogues with them
- Generate and provoke new ideas with users (they often imagine what things could be…)
- Offers a window into a 'reality' of the product experience
- To be surprised

Limitations

- Biased responses: users may tell you what they think you want to hear
- Mis-interpretation: the team running the research will need to infer meaning, which can generate mis-interpretation of the comments / data provided

Further resources

How to Conduct User Observations – Interaction Design Foundation

Prototype Testing – a step-by-step guide - qualaroo

DESIGN SPRINTS

Intro

Design Sprints combine innovation with user-generated research insights. Initially developed by Google Ventures to both streamline an innovation process and ensure it is meaningful and relevant. Initially conceived over a five-day period, Design Sprints bring people together around a central problem or challenge, integrate research data and expert testimony, generate a range of ideas, develop them, create low-fidelity prototypes and test them. Essentially combining methods detailed above in a targeted and efficient way. Sprints can be shorter, but the essentials remain. A focussed and targeted collaboration where participants completely focus on the task in hand. Key decision makers are also in the room, to ensure the ideas and development not only meet the problem but also alight with organisational strategy.

Considerations

Those planning to hold a Sprint may want to consider:

- Is it the approach you need? Is the output a new product, service, scheme or solution? The end point is not merely insights, but ones gathered a specific issue and with a focus on response.
- Time, skills and commitment to participate in week-long session: those who designed the Sprint process are adamant that this is a time-consuming process. But it's a rapid one that moves solutions forward at an accelerated pace. It also needs a facilitator to run the session and that those in the room are committed to remaining in the room.
- Sprint materials: there's a specific roadmap for sprints, and they need a range of materials and resources. A dedicated room, experts who can speak to the subject, post-its, timers and other elements are all needed.

Case studies

Design Sprints are used in multiple industries. From a Journalistic perspective, the approach has been used in several ways.

APA Media Lab: the Austrian Press Association's Media Lab ran repeated Sprints to develop products and services with their clients in mind. As WAN-IFRA's case study shows, that, before Covid, the association found it a valuable way to respond to their client's needs in a rapid and targeted way. It also contributed to a culture of innovation and transformation, which the sprint room being located next to the newsroom. Clemens Prerovksy told WAN-IFRA's Global Alliance for Media Innovation that the potential to create rapidly informed solutions is a key advantage:

> *One thing we've learned is that participating in a Design Sprint during one week is perceived as a very high commitment. Which is understandable, because you're really taken off the job for one week. But no one seems to realise that it would have otherwise taken half a year to develop the same project.*

But he advises they are not always successful – with outputs not always immediately viable or feasible.

We Are Europe: taking an editorial perspective, Dutch and Belgian foundation We Are Europe ran a Sprint not around product but around content. Travelling to Moldova, the project (funded by the Dutch Journalism Fund, worked with journalists and content creators (photographers, cinematographers, designers) to create a new and unique piece of journalism. The end of the week culminated in a showing of a 'prototype' story to 50 members of the local community. Advantages included the rapid development and production of content, but the workload to achieve this was deemed as highly challenging for the editorial team. To read more about their experience, head to https://ejc.net/resources/are-we-europe-design-sprint-moldova-drums-of-democracy

Opportunities

- Rapid 'ideation' informed by data and key informants' expertise
- Reduces long and drawn-out innovation process
- Pools multiple skills and roles to help solve the identified problem
- Provides concept validation / feedback with short development time
- Provides a 'direction of travel'
- Key decision maker involved to ensure focus and follow-on actions

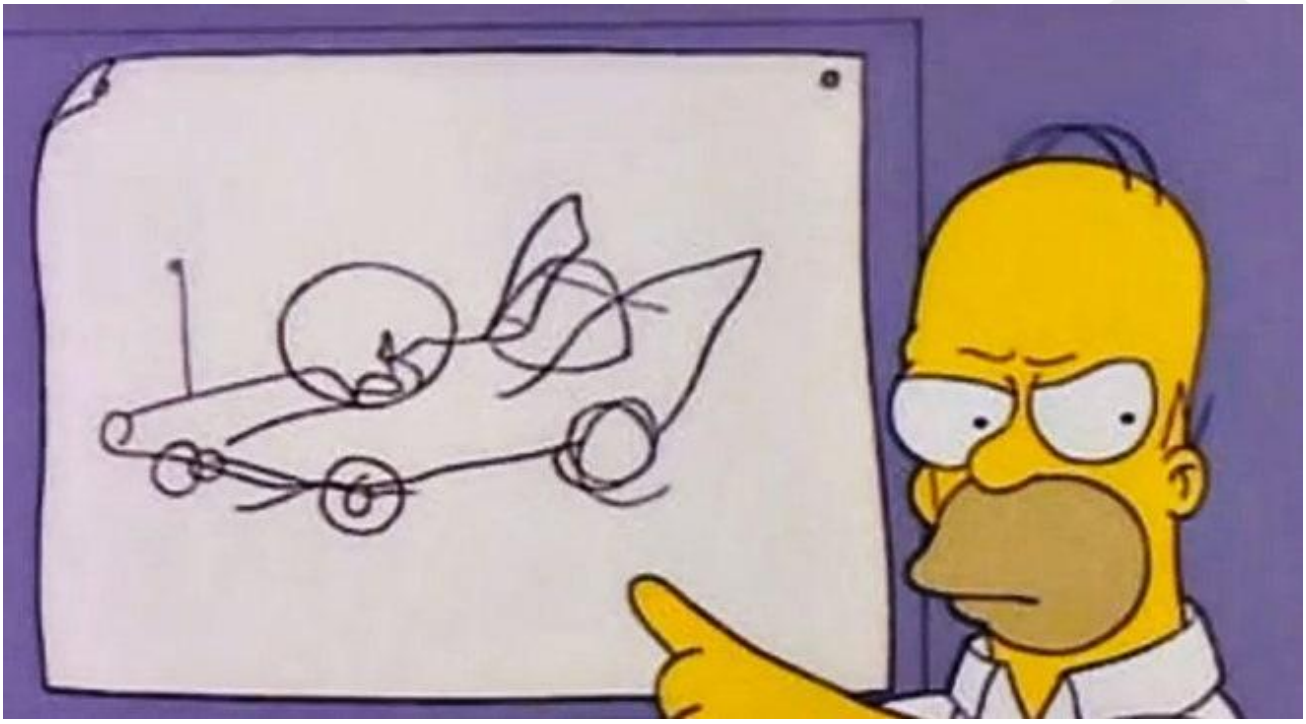
Limitations

- Initial concepts only: although rapid progress can be made, the outputs will require further work
- No deep primary research: research is rapidly collected and consumed. Sometime surface meaning is derived, and further 'deep' research is needed.
- People leaving / not engaging: if key individuals leave/are not committed, the Sprint is compromised
- Too narrow / too wide focus: the sprint needs to be manageable. Button colours and ways to save the world are too small / large

Further resources

The Design Sprint – Google Ventures

Ultimate Step-by-Step Guide for Design Sprint Beginners – workshopper.com



CO-CREATION & PARTICIPATORY DESIGN

Intro

Co-creation and participatory design places individuals and communities at the heart of innovation. The involvement of external individuals or groups in this way enables not just the creation of new products, services, editorial and revenue capture. It invites target audiences, users, clients or stakeholders to become part of the ideas process, feeding their knowledge, experience, insights, skills and perceptions of your organisation and / or brand into the innovation process. A result of this approach is that the internal team who are running the process can use the experience as research data. Understanding not just the inputs but the motivation for them, and then identifying themes and patterns that underpin them.

Case studies

Interactive Newsprint: Operating as a research and innovation project involving UCLan, the University of Dundee, technology company Novalia and a range of regional, hyperlocal and community media, Interactive Newsprint used participatory design and co-creation methods to help the project team imagine and design a brand-new technology/editorial platform. Community members and journalists inputted into to the process by giving thoughts and opinions on key issues and questions the project team had. They then moved this into generating new ideas for platforms, content, and functionalities to inspire the innovation team to create a range of platforms.

Figure 2: Interactive Newsprint workshop

Figure 3: Interactive Newsprint workshop materials

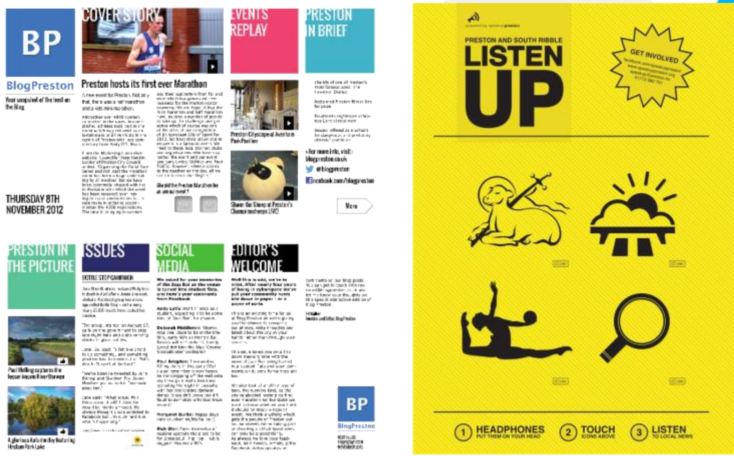


Figure 4: final prototypes

Tortoise UK: Founded with the aim to do journalism differently, with a slow news agenda, Tortoise involves its users in several different ways. TOne example includes 'ThinkIns', where editorial staff, experts and members convene in person to discuss and debate a key issue. The result is participatory journalism, which features users as being a core component in the final product. More information can be found here: https://www.tortoisemedia.com/thinkins/what-is-a-thinkin/

Seen: a music magazine start-up in Manchester UK is exploring alternative ways to engage their users, and potential users, into the development of their community-first publication. Co-founder Kamila Rymajdo explains that the publishers' launch-event founders' panel was important way to engage directly with audiences, hear directly from them and generate story, theme and commercial concepts. A further value was that their small but developing audience - all sharing similar interests - could connect with each other.

Requirements

- Time and skills / knowledge to deliver and analyse (themes, patterns, critical appraisal)
- Careful planning and preparation
- Identification and collaboration with users
- Building a relationship of empathy and trust

Opportunities

- Deep dive into user / stakeholder perspectives and opinions
- Engage positively with audiences and start / continue constructive dialogues with them
- Generate and provoke new ideas with users – created with a shared ownership
- Potential to generate more relevant and meaningful products
- Opportunity to identify and work with lead users

Limitations

- Time-consuming: organizing, conducting, analysing and creating concepts takes time
- Who owns the ideas!?: intellectual property surrounding concepts, stories and final products can be challenging – and needs establishing at the beginning of any co-creation process
- Sampling and echo chambers: focusing on one small subsection of users

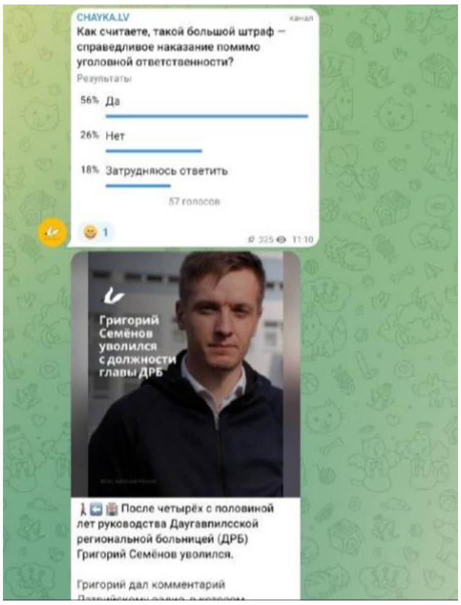
Further resources

What is Co-Creation? – Interaction Design Foundation

How the Guardian Co-Designs with readers – The Guardian

Triangulating methods: Chayka

Although these methods have been presented individually, any audience research should involve a range of approaches. Each individual method has strengths, but also weaknesses (see the Reforge table at the end of this document). By deploying 'mixed methods', you can ensure that you're capturing a range of rich data. The whats? and the whys? One example of how this works in practice is Chayka. The Latvian Russian language publisher engages in a range of formal and informal activities that span qualitative and quantitative approaches. Although some of these examples could be deemed to be engagement or interaction with audiences, once they are seen as audience research, new opportunities present themselves. Examples include:



1-2-1 interviews: the publisher conducted over 360 interviews to gain a deep understanding of their audiences and potential audience. This work was funded externally and conducted by a third-party market research team. The report provided a range of insights to help the newsroom develop content and product. Although the work is now over four years old, and some of the audience demographic and interests have changed, co-founder of Chayka Natalja Paļčevska suggests the results are still useful and referred to.

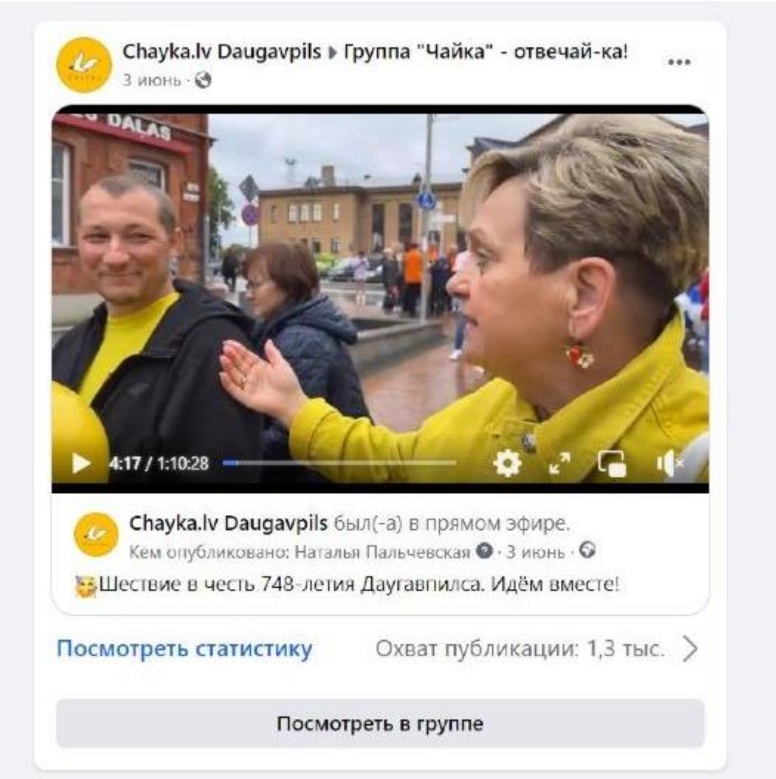
Surveys: the publisher uses a range of surveys on content to guide audience preferences and to add into general debate. These also run on multiple social platforms – Telegram and Facebook – and create a space where content and opinions can be shared in a number of ways.

Patreon conversations: on Patreon – a crowdsourcing revenue generation platform – the editorial team provide quick validation on content, and, on Patreon, dedicated members and donors are asked.

Participatory investigations: Chayka has also worked with publishers and communities to co-create editorial content. Paļčevska explains: "During this time, we worked on investigations and communication with people who live in Daugavpils and Latgale. Essentially, anyone could come and share their thoughts. Based on this information, we created a series of materials and helped Re:Baltica with some investigation."

Events: working with local business incubator units, the publisher also appears at a range of events to network with start-ups and SMEs. This allows them both to extend their brand but also better understand the topics and issues that they wanted and needed to know more about.

1-2-1 interviews – ongoing: finally, Paļčevska adds that she is constantly doing audience research simply by having conversations with members of the public. This allows a direct and ongoing dialogue with readers and potential readers. Essentially, positioning ongoing dialogue as a standard part of operational procedure.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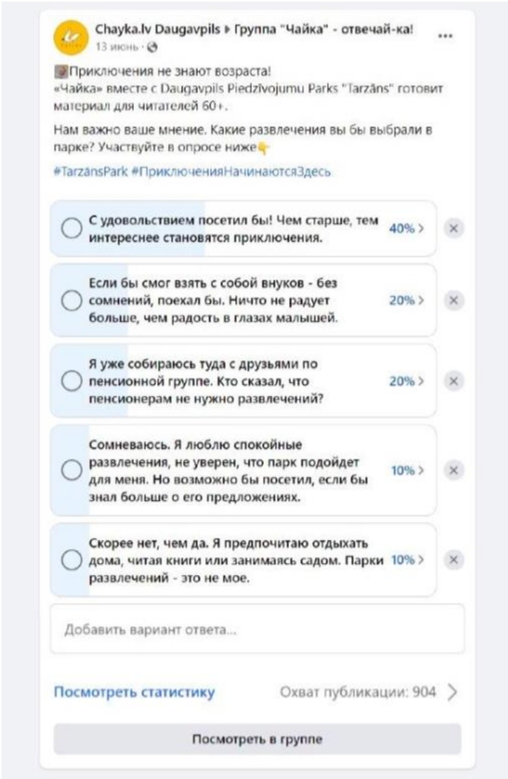
Chayka.lv Daugavpils ▸ Группа "Чайка" - отвечай-ка!
13 июнь
Приключения не знают возраста!
«Чайка» вместе с Daugavpils Piedzīvojumu Parks "Tarzāns" готовит материал для читателей 60+.
Нам важно ваше мнение. Какие развлечения вы бы выбрали в парке? Участвуйте в опросе ниже
#TarzānsPark #ПриключенияНачинаютсяЗдесь
С удовольствием посетил бы! Чем старше, тем интереснее становятся приключения. 40%
Если бы смог взять с собой внуков - без сомнений, поехал бы. Ничто не радует больше, чем радость в глазах малышей. 20%
Я уже собираюсь туда с друзьями по пенсионной группе. Кто сказал, что пенсионерам не нужно развлечений? 20%
Сомневаюсь. Я люблю спокойные развлечения, не уверен, что парк подойдет для меня. Но возможно бы посетил, если бы знал больше о его предложениях. 10%
Скорее нет, чем да. Я предпочитаю отдыхать дома, читая книги или занимаясь садом. Парки развлечений - это не мое. 10%
Добавить вариант ответа...
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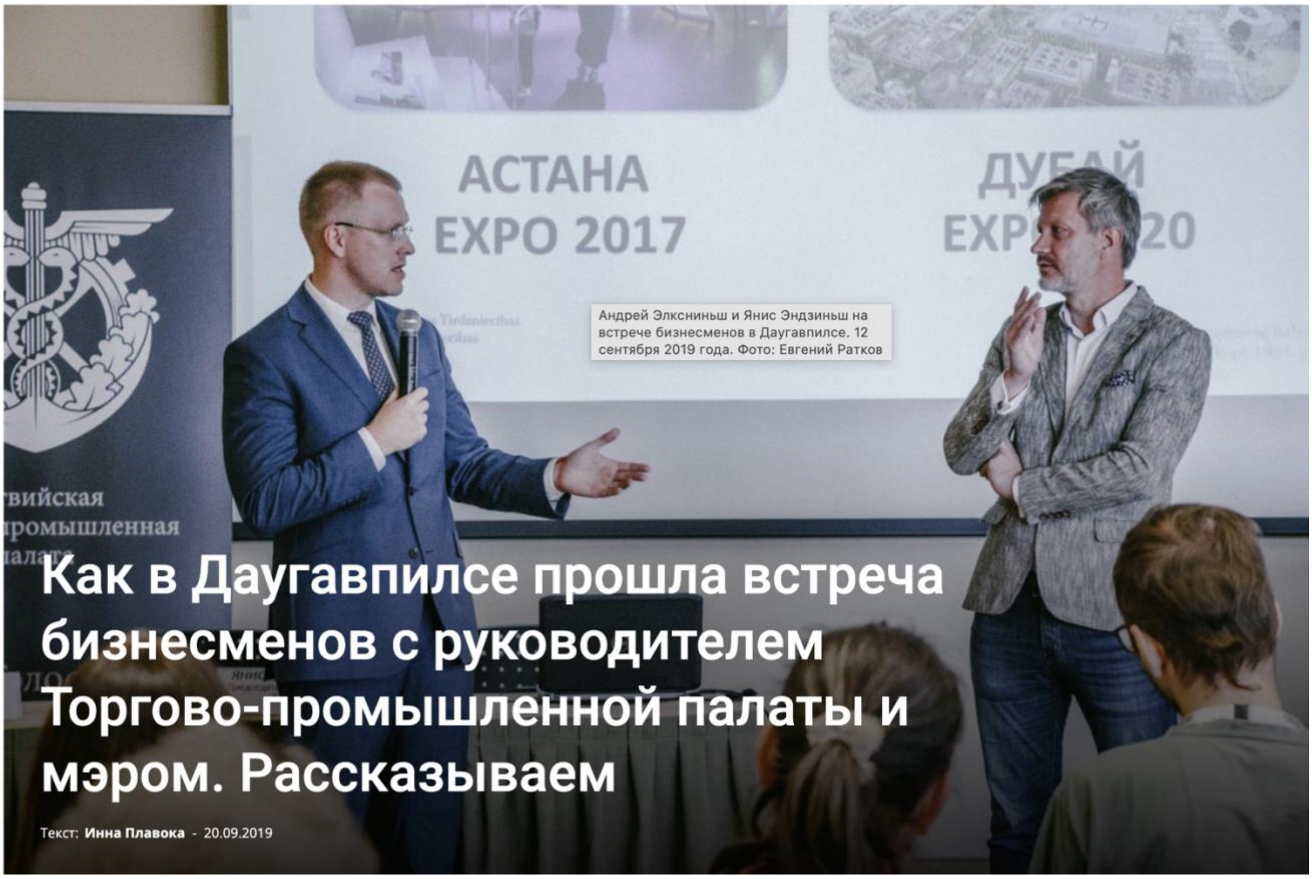
АСТАНА
EXPO 2017
ДУБАЙ
EXP 20
Андрей Элксниньш и Янис Эндзиньш на встрече бизнесменов в Даугавпилсе. 12 сентября 2019 года. Фото: Евгений Ратков
Как в Даугавпилсе прошла встреча бизнесменов с руководителем Торгово-промышленной палаты и мэром. Рассказываем
Текст: Инна Плавока - 20.09.2019

FINAL THOUGHTS

To end this resource pack, and as covered in our workshops, a selection of final key thoughts may be useful to help guide your next steps.

- **Identify** your research question – the issue that you need data on as a priority for strategic or practical reasons
- **Who**: consider who you want to help you answer questions. New users, existing users, exiting users, editorial teams, doners, advertisers or key stakeholder?
- **Who and How** will you do this research: will it be assigned to the newsroom? Do you need an external to deliver the core activities? This is a skills, resources and strategic question.
- **What**: Identify which of the tools we've covered could be most useful in answering your question(s). Are other tools more applicable?
- **What**: to help make resource decisions, consider which approach(es) are desirable, feasible and viable.
- **When**: audience research should be ongoing and iterative.
- **When**: before, during and after development or innovation activity can all – in isolation or collectively – be useful to measure progress.

General resources

To help guide your research activities more broadly, below is a short selection of resources to help you navigate your research journey.

[Product research and when to use each]() – Reforge

[Conducting Audience Research]() – The Membership Guide

[An Introduction to Codes and Coding]() – Saldana, published by Sage

[How to Collaborate with Stakeholders in UX research]() – Nielsen Norman Group

[The Audiencers]() – providing a range of tools and industry intelligence around audience engagement and research.

Reforge table

As discussed in workshop 1, this table from Reforge provides an excellent overview of the uses, strengths and weaknesses of various research. It is reproduced here for your reference.

	Observational			Conversational			Testing			Surveys		
	Participant Observation	Ethnographic Research	Heat Mapping	Interviews	Focus Groups	Design Methods	Usability Testing	A/B Testing	Beta Testing	Map-Making Survey	Intercept Survey	Validation Survey
Problem Identification	★★	★★	★★	★★★	★	★				★★	★★	★★
Problem Understanding	★★	★★	★	★★★	★★	★				★★	★	★
Problem Prioritization	★	★★	★	★★★	★★★	★★★				★★★	★★	★★
Solution Ideation		★★		★★★	★★★	★★★				★		
Solution Design		★★		★★★	★★★	★★★	★★					
Solution Validation		★		★★	★★	★★	★★	★				
Solution Value		★		★★★			★★★	★★	★★		★	★
Solution Usability	★★	★	★★	★★			★★★	★★	★★		★	★
Solution Discoverability			★	★			★★★	★★		★	★★	
Performance			★	★★	★		★★	★★★	★★	★	★	★
Satisfaction				★★	★		★★	★	★★★	★★★	★★★	★★★
Disruption	★★	★	★★	★★	★		★★	★★		★	★	★

Now, the truth of the matter is, as a journalist, you are a convener of a community, your community of readers, your audience and your you serve them. I mean, basically, they're the boss, right? Like my view and most journalists will pay lip service to this, but don't necessarily always enact that day to day. But the reality is, is at the centre of everything you do should be your reader. They're the ones you serve. And your job is to like any good person who's serving somebody, understand them. Ask them what they want from you, anticipate their interests and give them what they need.

Misha Ketchell
The Conversation

Prepared by

ARCHEN innovate

IMS

European Commission

Journalismfund Europe

EUI CENTRE FOR MEDIA PLURALISM AND MEDIA FREEDOM

EFJ FEP EJF FEJ