

# SMS technology: evaluating media for youth audiences

**Steve Watkins**, 2cv, shows how SMS diaries provide a very viable basis for assessing the quality of media experiences

**A**S MEDIA TRADING moves closer to single currencies (the latest addition being Mercury Fusion) and, inevitably, further commoditisation, perhaps it is an important time to remind the industry to think behind these numbers. Both quantitative and qualitative research can and should be used to throw light on media relationships and media consumption quality specific to advertisers' target audiences.

If reach and frequency – that is to say consumption – is the currency of the media trading process, we would argue it should not be the starting point of media planning. In fact it should be used only at the end of the process. Once an advertiser's target audience has been defined, we believe that the starting point should be to assess those media that they actively select and consume. This is demonstrated in the two models in Table 1. The media quality planning model starts by speaking to the target consumer; the conventional model relies on existing data.

In a recent study from the ROAR consortium, the focus was on two areas that look behind and beyond the usual currency of media planning and buying.

**1.** Measuring the quality of media consumption (QOMC) of 15–24 year olds.

**2.** Assessing media brand equity and media brand personalities in the youth sector.

This article focuses on the first of those topics.

## Why measure the quality of media consumption?

Just for a minute, let's liken media planning and buying to buying a holiday. We have all done this at some point and probably have also had mixed results.

**The bargain approach:** You hunt through teletext, lastminute.com and the classified ads in the Sunday papers. You know you want to go to the Barbados, so you focus on that in your search. You collect your information (prices, dates, agency numbers and hotel names). You find a 'bargain', so you call the travel agent

who confirms that the flight and hotel are available. You try to prise out as much information from the travel agent as possible because the hotel is not in any brochure. You ask him where the hotel is and he confirms the location (somewhere that you have not heard of, but he assures you it is close to the main resort). You arrive two weeks later in the middle of nowhere to a rickety hotel but decide to make the most of it and you have an OK time. After all it was a bargain.

**The value for money approach:** You decide to go to Barbados. So you decide to start off by speaking to those people who have the most knowledge – the tourist board. You speak to a really nice woman who actually used to live out in Barbados, so knows all the resorts pretty well. She gives you some good advice about the best times to visit and resorts suitable to your requirements, and provides you with a list of reputable travel agents and tour operators. You choose a resort that seems to suit your taste. You then go through the brochure and check out several hotels that look suitable, finally deciding on one that is located ideally (a further conversation with the tourist board confirms this). You arrive two weeks later to a fantastic resort that suits you down to the ground, and have a superb time. You ended up paying a little more but the difference was more than worth it. You got value for money.

## What has this got to do with media planning and buying?

Consider the first example, the bargain approach. You had all the basic facts in place before you booked (just like reach and frequency and cost per thousand). You had talked it through with the travel agent (let's assume a media owner, for the sake of comparison). However, you had not spoken to anybody who had ever been to the actual resort (let's call that the target audience). You were just relying on recorded facts (let's call that secondary information). The result was below average.

TABLE 1

### Conventional and media quality planning model

#### Conventional media planning model

Begins with an assessment of consumption and research into consumption behaviour

Selection of media based on consumption  
Some PASSIVE, some not, hit and miss.

Media selection based on reach and frequency – UNINVOLVED

Some media vehicles reach a higher proportion of target consumers than others

*'The cost per thousand of reaching x% of brand y consumers is...'*

#### Media quality planning model

Begins with consumers selecting media, and research to discover what engages them and what they are passionate about

ACTIVE

Media selection is based on the consumer's level of interaction – INVOLVED

The target consumer experiences some media vehicles and consumes others

*'The value per thousand of x% of brand y consumers experiencing the media we select is...'*

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TABLE 2

**QoMC planned vs unplanned media consumption**

	Mean rating for enjoyment	Mean rating for engaged
All planned media consumption	7.5	7.6
All unplanned media consumption	6.6	6.3

Note: all media activities are rated on a 10 point scale where 1 is lowest and 10 is highest

This article demonstrates a technique that will allow advertisers to:

1. select their media more effectively around their target market
2. select those media their target are really involved with and enjoy
3. ensure that advertiser money is not wasted on media that are merely consumed. After all, the highest reach or the lowest cost per thousand, says nothing about the value of the execution bought.

**Measuring the QoMC (quality of media consumption) of 15-24-year-olds**

The approach we took was to use sms text in a week-long media diary amongst 150 15-24 year olds. The aim was simply to capture media moments in situ and to get respondents to rate them in terms of:

- ▶ how much they enjoyed the experience
- ▶ how engaged they were during the experience.

We also collected other information from each text sent in: who they were with – for example alone, or with friends – whether the media moment was task, or pleasure driven; further detail about the media they were using – for example newspaper section – and whether the experience was planned or unplanned.

Some of the benefits of using sms text,

particularly among young audiences, as opposed to ordinary paper diaries are that:

- ▶ you get a fairly precise measure of the time that the event happened (standard for sms). This allows for more accurate analysis of the data by daypart, for example, or time spent with a given medium
- ▶ mobiles are much more portable than paper diaries and respondents – particularly young ones – are much more inclined to take them out with them. This is particularly relevant to outdoor and ambient media
- ▶ data capture is simplified.

**Pre-planned activity has a positive effect**

Whether a 15-24-year-old has planned to participate in a media activity or just ended up doing it appears to have a dramatic impact upon QoMC scores (how much they enjoyed and how engaged they were). Planned media activity means many things. It could be regular reading, for example, always buying the *News Of The World* on a Sunday for football news. It can also mean something that is looked up beforehand, for example a programme circled in a tv guide. But to summarise, planned media activity requires the consumer to have made an active decision about using it, so channel hopping, for example, or picking up a Metro whilst on the tube, are not considered to be planned media activities.

If a media activity is planned, we see significantly higher QoMC ratings, (Table 2). This may seem obvious, but is often lost or not considered.

**Mutual media consumption does not alter QoMC**

There are obvious situations where mutual media consumption is more beneficial, even crucial – for example duel targeting of mums and kids: pester power! You could also think of situations when targeting 15-24s where there is benefit to be derived from talking to groups. Indeed, generating instantaneous word-of-mouth

is very important in youth marketing. However, our study indicates that QoMC amongst 15-24s is not affected by whether media is consumed on one's own or with others.

As Table 3 demonstrates, there is no significant difference in QoMC scores between mutual and solus media consumption. The scores are virtually identical for both analysis breaks.

**Task driven media does not necessarily mean lower QoMC**

Task-driven media consumption – for example looking for jobs, online shopping, online information searches and browsing the classified sections of newspapers – by its nature is not as entertaining as watching the latest blockbuster film. Having said that, the action of searching in itself is active, so it requires involvement. This is reflected in our findings and demonstrated in Figure 1. When comparing task-only with pleasure-only media activities there is a clear disparity in enjoyment scores. However, there is only a small directional difference in the average 'engaged' scores.

So while most youth advertisers will clearly want to seek out those pleasure-only media environments, the good news

TABLE 3

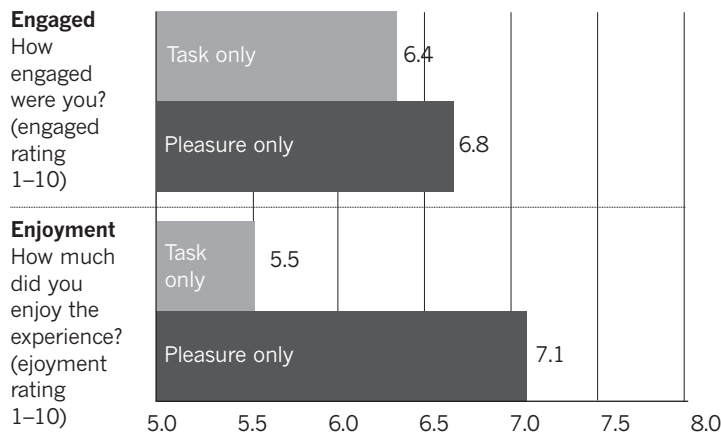
**QoMC solus vs mutual media consumption**

	Mean rating for enjoyment	Mean rating for engaged
All mutual media consumption	6.9	6.8
All solus media consumption	6.9	6.7

Note: all media activities are rated on a 10 point scale where 1 is lowest and 10 is highest

FIGURE 1

**QoMC task related vs pleasure related media consumption**



Note: all media activities are rated on a 10 point scale where 1 is lowest and 10 is highest

is that your audience may well be as tuned in to those less interesting, more task-orientated environments. Of course you may find that some task-orientated environments used by your target audience yield higher involvement scores than others (perhaps on-line versus off-line?). It is also worth bearing in mind that according to our study only around 8% of 15-24s' media consumption is task-driven, but 63% of internet usage is.

**Where do we find higher QoMCs for 15-24s?**

A good starting point is to look at media as a whole. At this level we see an expected picture. Cinema far outweighs other media in terms of QoMC, (see Figure 2). Magazines and tv are next in rank.

We aimed to get an impression at media genre level. A quick overview of these findings is demonstrated in Table 4 (Again activities are rated on a 10-point scale, where 1 is low and 10 is high)

We see in the top tier, which we call 'hot media environments', music shows, for example *CDUK*, and documentaries such as the BBC's *Walking With Beasts*, which was a key contributor at the time. These are rich youth advertiser environments. In the next tier down, 'warm media environments', we find sitcoms, sport, reality/people tv – *Pop Idol* was the main one at the time, dance/R&B (radio genre) and print celebrity newspaper sections.

The third tier down, – 'neutral media environments' – is where we find genres

and environments that receive average scores for audience enjoyment and engagement. Here we find soaps, serial dramas, the charts (radio genre) and fashion and lads magazines. Below this tier are genres and environments that generate below average QoMC scores, or 'tepid media environments'. These should generally be avoided.

Another feature of the study is the ability to look for more effective times to make contact with your target audience. For example, Figure 3 demonstrates how

QoMC for 15-24s starts to increase significantly after around 7 pm at weekends (ie Saturday and Sunday average scores).

**Individual programmes and media brands**

The study enabled us to get close to the target audience, down to an individual programme level, and gave us some indications about which programmes were hot at the time. This also applies to radio stations, newspaper titles, websites and magazines. With a larger sample we would start to uncover environments within media titles as well, for example, which newspaper sections and supplements produced better QoMC scores.

**Rolling out this methodology to other audiences**

Whether we are talking youth demographic or what we call 'youth mindset' (25-35), the methodology used in this study can be applied universally – potentially across Europe. Mobile penetration and use of text is such that we can design samples around virtually any advertiser target audience that falls within these age brackets. The methodology is quick and cost-effective. In my time in media research I have seen traditional diary approaches applied in media agencies that yield half the sample for twice the

FIGURE 3

**QoMC mapped at media level**

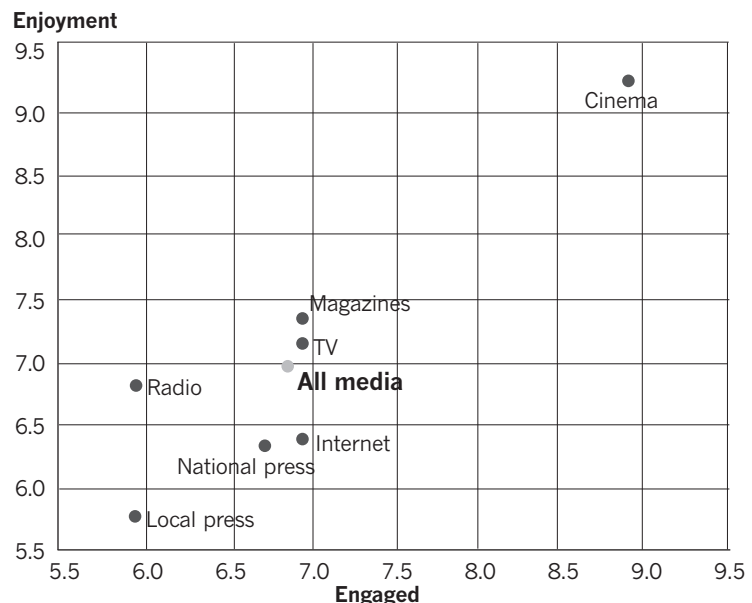
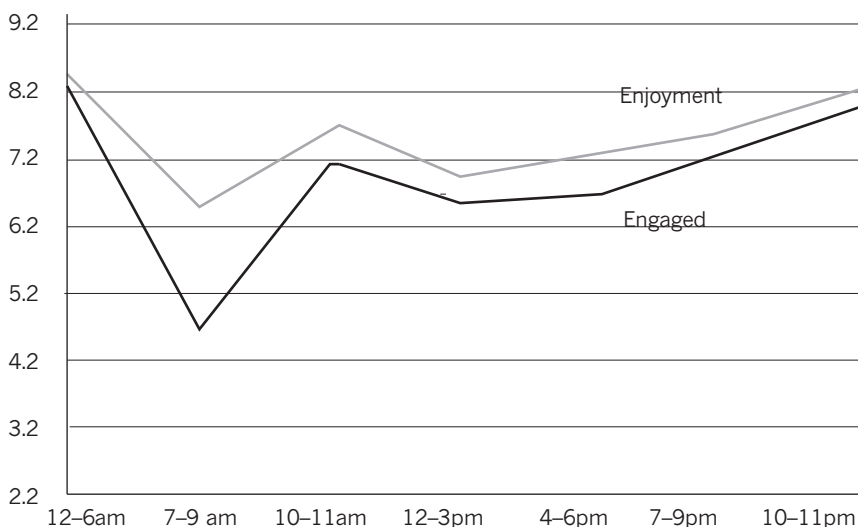


TABLE 4

**QoMC planned vs unplanned media consumption**

Media genre and environment	Enjoyment	Engaged
TV – music shows (all except music video platforms)	8.5	7.7
TV – documentary	7.8	8.4
TV – sitcoms	8.1	7.4
TV – sport	7.8	7.4
TV – celebrity talk shows	7.8	7.4
Radio –dance/R&B	7.8	7.3
TV – reality/people TV	7.6	7.4
Print – celebrity news	7.8	7.1
TV – chat shows	7.3	7.6
TV – films	7.6	7.2
TV – soap	7.2	7.0
TV – serial drama	7.1	6.8
TV –teen/youth TV	7.4	6.5
<b>All genres and environments</b>	<b>7.0</b>	<b>6.8</b>
TV – football	7.0	6.9
TV – charts	7.2	6.5
Fashion mags	7.1	6.4
Lads mags	6.7	6.8
TV – music video platform	7.2	6.0
Print – news	6.2	6.8
TV – news	5.5	7.4
TV – quiz shows	6.3	6.5
Print – sport	6.2	6.5
<b>TV – breakfast TV</b>	<b>4.0</b>	<b>5.2</b>

FIGURE 3

**QoMC at weekends**

‘SMS text technology can provide advertisers with the ability to research and understand the media habits of new target groups’

cost of the text diary approach, because of the processing time needed to convert paper results to analysable data.

**Summary**

Advertisers continually think up new ways to segment their markets and create new target audiences. SMS text technology can provide advertisers with the ability to research and understand the media habits (particularly QoMC) of these new target groups quickly and cost effectively.

When committing to any sizeable media budget and in particular to reach a new target audience, a small investment in obtaining a blueprint that differentiates between weak and strong media consumption is surely worthwhile.

We have seen how we can use technology to find quickly the answers to media planning issues for example:

- ▶ when should we connect with our target?
- ▶ through which channels?
- ▶ in which environments?

This approach, when used in conjunction with qualitative techniques, can also help us to understand the depth of the media relationship and the context of the communication.

Finally, while some of the top-line results from the study are summarised here, the intention of this article is to demonstrate the techniques, not to be a guide to media planning for youth audiences. ■

*Acknowledgements go to ROAR for allowing me to use their data in the publication of this article. ROAR is a consortium of EMAP, Channel 4, The Guardian & OMD UK. For more information regarding ROAR visit [www.roar.org.uk](http://www.roar.org.uk)*

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