

Current Affairs

Qualitative audience research

Presented by Alison Preston, Ofcom

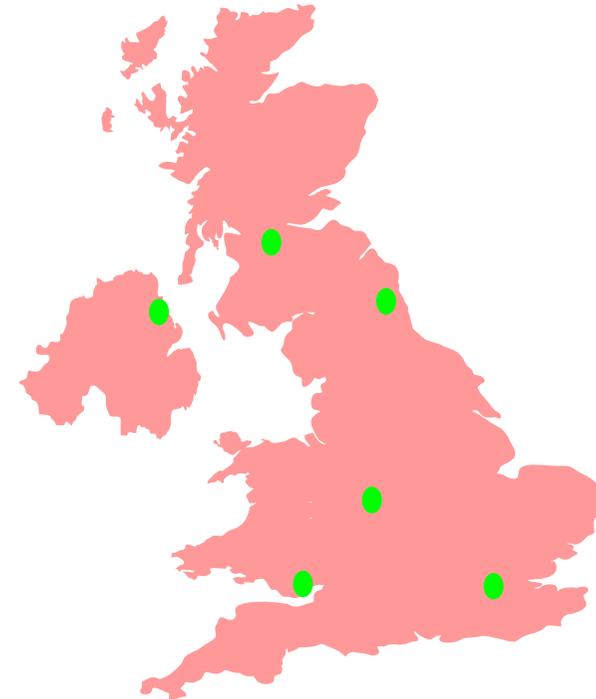
Current Affairs Seminar, Tuesday 28 March 2006

Contents

- Scope of the research
- What is current affairs?
- Why do we watch it, why don't we watch it?
- Subjects and treatments
- The future

What we did

- Research carried out by TWRResearch
- 12 focus groups in 6 locations across the UK
 - groups carried out in each nation
 - a range of age groups, socio-economic groups, etc.
 - fieldwork took place Dec 05 / Jan 06
- Active recruitment of CA viewers
 - subdivided into self-defined regular and light



Sample	City	Viewers	Channel
	London	Regular CA viewers 35-44 Female BC1	Multi-channel
	Cardiff	Lapsed CA viewers 25-34 Male BC1	Multi-channel
	Birmingham	Regular CA viewers 18-24 Female C1C2	Analogue
	Newcastle	Regular CA viewers 25-34 Female C2D	Multi-channel
	Belfast	Regular CA viewers 18-24 Female BC1	Multi-channel
	Glasgow	Regular CA viewers 18-24 Male C1C2	Multi-channel
		Regular CA viewers 45 plus Male C1C2	Multi-channel
		Regular CA viewers 35-44 Female C2D	Analogue
		Regular CA viewers 25-34 Male C2D	Multi-channel
		Lapsed CA viewers 35-44 Male BC1	Multi-channel
		Regular CA viewers 45 plus Male C1C2	Analogue
		Lapsed CA viewers 45 plus Female C2D	Multi-channel

Contents

- Scope of the research
- What is current affairs?
- Why do we watch it, why don't we watch it?
- Subjects and treatments
- The future

What is current affairs?



The definition of Current Affairs for viewers is elastic

TOP OF MIND

- Narrow definition
- What *others* (broadcasters) consider to be topical and current affairs
- Didactic, 'serious' news associations, social issues, politics
- Based on preconceptions, rather than experience

CONSIDERED

- Broad elastic definition
- Anything that is:
 - topical
 - relevant to me
 - of interest to me
- Surprise about the amount of current affairs programming out there

'...mainly what's going on around my area, what's going on around Birmingham, what's going on around me and what's going to affect me and what ain't' 25-34 Male, Birmingham

'I started off doing news, and Question Time, then I thought well actually is something like 'Have I Got News For You' current affairs. Although it is jokey and funny, they do talk about what's going on in the world.....' 35-44, Female, London

Blurring of current affairs and in-depth news, local news and documentaries

'I was surprised at how many current affairs programmes were on during the day, I'd never heard of half of them...' (25-35, Female, Newcastle)

Contents

- Scope of the research
- What is current affairs?
- Why do we watch it, why don't we watch it?
- Subjects and treatments
- The future

Why do we watch it?



REASONS TO WATCH

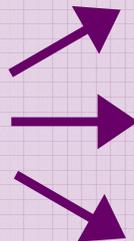
Interest in particular
Subjects



Personal relevance

Societal or general
importance

To be knowledgeable



Not to 'look stupid'

Be part of what's
going on and talk
with family/friends

Be able to have an
educated opinion

Extreme Facts!...

Voyeurism...

'I have contact with different people every 20 minutes and you can guarantee everyone's point of view is different, so it's quite important for me to be pretty up on what's going on so you don't look a divvy.'
35-44, Male, Newcastle

Current affairs has to battle within the schedule



'If I see an advert for Panorama on TV and it looks good, I'll definitely try to remember to watch it' 35-44, Male, Newcastle

Not necessarily planned viewing, relies on a chance encounter or a seeing a trailer

'I like the Channel4 news, I think it sometimes covers a bit more current affairs, it seems a bit more in-depth' 35-44, Male, Newcastle

News programmes cover issues in depth

TV is primarily a leisure media

Domestic compromises occur

'I watch that one just because it is on a Sunday and it's on at lunch time when I'm in the kitchen... if I had Sky Sports in the kitchen I probably wouldn't watch it you know?' Male, 35-44 Newcastle

What drives people to watch?

Contents

- Scope of the research
- What is current affairs?
- Why do we watch it, why don't we watch it?
- Subjects and treatments
- The future

Blurring of international and domestic



International subjects

'Things that affect me' definition of CA is extending overseas

Politics

Process not appreciated by many – people want outcomes

Consumer/social affairs

Increasing interest in consumer issues and direct effect

Compelling CA (treatments)



'What annoys me is that you don't see any outcome of it, I think they're always banging on about terrorism and I think that's why I don't watch it and I switch off because I think nothing ever happens' 25-34, Female, Newcastle

'Like with Jamie's School Dinners, it's a good way of getting it across to people in an entertaining way and it achieved something and people like to see results. He went out and he changed something' 35-44, Female, London

'With undercover programmes you see the real truth, not someone's point of view, the cameras show you what's really going on' 18-24, Female, Belfast

Appreciation of and desire for outcomes

- Enjoy and value programmes that achieve something e.g. Jamie's School Dinners and John Pilger
- Not just straightforward debate

Engagement, entertainment, reality and experience is often important

- To engage in an issue and bring it to life
- To be 'good TV'
- To show the 'real story'
- Treatment can encourage or discourage interest in a certain topic

Importance of impartiality is contested



Overwhelming desire for balance

- Within a programme or with a schedule
- Although 'traditional' balanced CA programmes not always seen as good TV

You have got to believe that it is balanced, that is the whole idea....' 45-65. Male, Belfast

'I think the presenters shouldn't have an opinion, they should have an open mind.' 25-34 Male, Cardiff

Increased appreciation of strong, polarised opinions

- Because of lack of perceived censorship and seeing the 'real story' e.g. Fahrenheit 9/11
- However, Michael Moore is known for his strength of views and the audience appears to bear this in mind when watching (and the media coverage and film status make these unique cases)

'We don't want to be patronised, we don't want to be spoon fed with information...What I like about Supersize Me is that actually it affected McDonalds' 35-44, Female, London

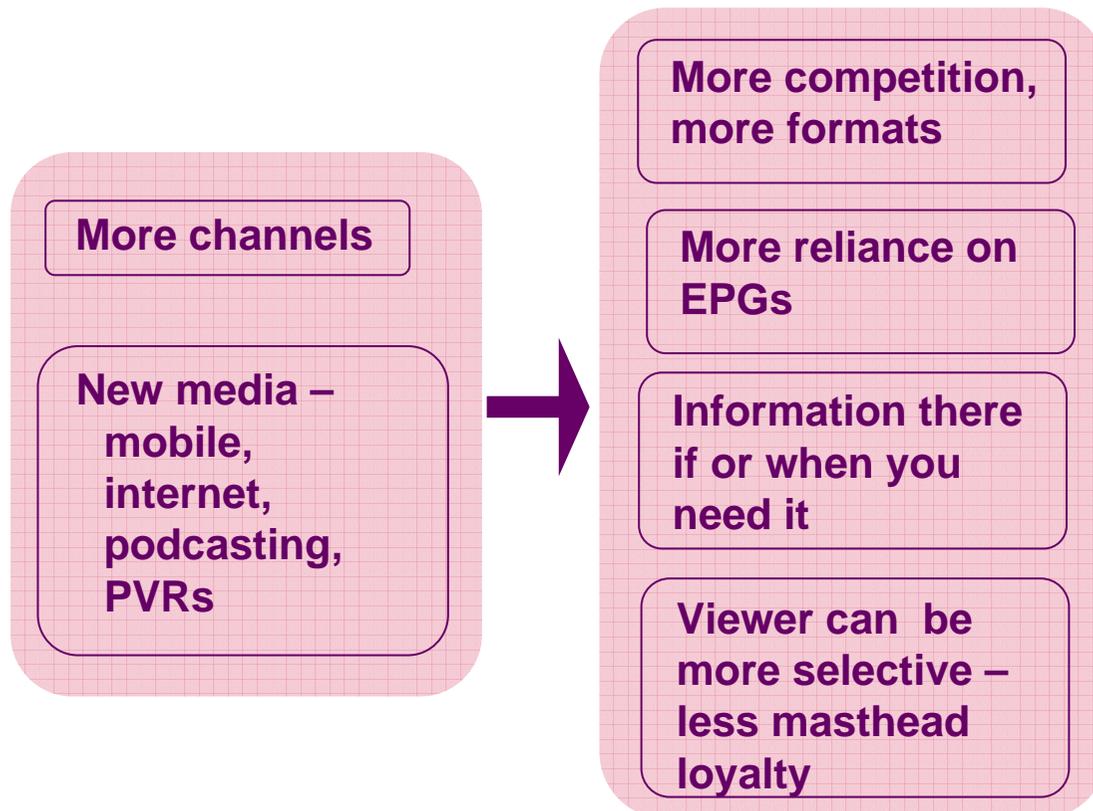
But it's up to you to say well there's some good points there but he's terribly biased and Michael Moore is very against the government and opinionated but everyone knows that about him and he does come out with some good facts. 35-44, Female, London

Contents

- Scope of the research
- What is current affairs?
- Why do we watch it, why don't we watch it?
- Subjects and treatments
- The future

The future





Threats:

- Easier to *avoid* current affairs (whilst knowing it is there if you want it)
- Current affairs has to work harder to get through

Opportunities:

- Ability to timeshift or record programmes
- News provided by portable devices but understanding still the province of TV