

Ehrenberg-Bass Institute Working Paper

Abstract accepted into the Australian and New Zealand Marketing Academy Conference

“Benchmarks for Mechanical Avoidance of Radio Advertising”

Authors:

Aaron Michelon - Ehrenberg-Bass Institute

Prof. Steven Bellman - Ehrenberg-Bass Institute

Dr Justin Cohen - Ehrenberg-Bass Institute

Dr Margaret Faulkner - Ehrenberg-Bass Institute

Prof. Johan Bruwer - Ehrenberg-Bass Institute



Benchmarks for Mechanical Avoidance of Radio Advertising

Aaron Michelin*, Ehrenberg-Bass Institute for Marketing Science, University of South Australia, micaj002@mymail.unisa.edu.au

Steven Bellman, Ehrenberg-Bass Institute for Marketing Science, University of South Australia.

Justin Cohen, Ehrenberg-Bass Institute for Marketing Science, University of South Australia,

Margaret Faulkner, Ehrenberg-Bass Institute for Marketing Science, University of South Australia.

Johan Bruwer, Ehrenberg-Bass Institute for Marketing Science, University of South Australia,

Short Abstract:

Radio is capable of unduplicated reach outside of TV's prime time, thereby adding to TV-led advertising campaigns, as TV audiences are increasingly fragmenting. But studies over the past twenty years have wide-ranging results due to differences in geographic location, age of the study, and sampling method used (e.g. surveys vs. electronic recordings). Since little is known about how much radio advertising effectiveness is affected by advertising avoidance, this research proposes using the Persuasion Knowledge Model to explain the rate of radio advertising avoidance by channel switching, estimated using data from portable people meters. The study aims to provide clarity about how avoidance, as a coping strategy, varies across different dayparts (e.g., drivetime vs. daytime), content types (e.g. music vs. talk), and age groups. The results will provide benchmarks for US radio advertising avoidance and improve advertisers' understanding of the differences in advertising exposure across TV and radio.

Keywords: Radio Advertising Effectiveness, Mechanical Advertising Avoidance, and Benchmarks

Introduction and Research Objective

Increasing television audience fragmentation makes it harder for advertisers to reach all category buyers, which is required to grow market share (Sharp, 2010). Media scheduling has increased in complexity, as advertisers need to schedule across TV programs and different media (Lin, Venkataraman, & Jap, 2013). Radio is increasingly attractive as a medium, as it adds unduplicated reach and also reaches consumers outside TV's prime time (Sharp, 2013), and it is also fragmenting. Advances in digital radio (e.g. Satellite) are growing channel options for listeners, and creating added complexity for advertisers. Radio channel proliferation encourages audience fragmentation (Callius, 2008), and as a result, audience levels per radio channel are declining (Nelson-Field & Riebe, 2011; Sharp, 2013). This mirrors TV viewing behaviour being spread across more channels and times (Warc, 2016).

Advertising exposure benchmarks allow advertisers to convert ratings, which indicate how many potential customers were reached with an opportunity-to-hear (OTH), into a more realistic, lower number of customers effectively reached with sufficient exposure quality. One feature that is believed to reduce radio ad exposure quality is the presence of mechanical ad avoidance, that is, switching channels during ad breaks (North & van Muers, 2004). Prior radio research by academics and industry shows that ad break ratings are usually lower than program ratings, due to switching behaviour (Abernethy, 1991). As with TV ratings, aggregated ratings during radio advertising breaks may overstate reach and exposure quality. Aggregate ratings offer a net effect of two audience flows (churn): switching-in and -out of a channel (van Meurs, 1998). If this rate of churn is very high, very few audience members are receiving desired exposure to any single ad. The literature is lacking research looking at the churn during a radio ad break. Given that sufficient advertising exposure is essential to nudging brand awareness and sales (Romaniuk & Sharp, 2016), providing a deeper understanding of radio advertising avoidance will contribute to the literature on avoidance behaviours.

Channel switching is just one type of advertising avoidance, which is defined as "...all actions by media users that differentially reduce their exposure to ad content" (Speck & Elliott, 1997, p. 61). Over the past 55 years, previous studies examining observed and claimed data have identified three types of advertising avoidance (Bellman, Schweda, & Varan, 2010). People can avoid advertising by ignoring it (cognitive avoidance), leaving the room (behavioural avoidance), or switching channels (mechanical avoidance) (Speck & Elliott, 1997). Estimates of the rates of each type of avoidance vary with the method used (S. Dix & Phau, 2010; S. R. Dix & Phau, 2017; McDowell & Dick, 2003; Speck & Elliott, 1997). For example, observation studies typically reveal higher rates of mechanical avoidance (55%) than electronic portable people meters (PPMs) studies (7%) (Abernethy, 1991; Generali & Kurtzman, 2015). Avoidance behaviour may be more natural when viewers are not being observed, or PPMs may understate individual avoidance by aggregating data. Mechanical avoidance is easiest to identify; and arguably improves, rather than reduces exposure quality. Mechanical avoidance of TV ads requires greater than average attention to the screen, and therefore improves memory and sales effects (Bellman et al., 2010). This same providential effect may be true for radio advertising. Switching channel exposure time is a better measure of radio-ad exposure quality than simple binary measure of whether or not the ad was avoided altogether.

This research investigates a gap in the literature regarding current benchmarks for switching behaviours during radio ad breaks. The objective of this research is to:

Benchmark the current effectiveness of radio advertising by estimating the average rate of mechanical avoidance (channel switching) during ad breaks, controlling for the influence of switching on aggregated ratings during ad breaks. Thereby contributing to the refinement of advertising effectiveness models and guidance for buying better radio spots.

Rationale and Research Questions

This study's conceptual model is based on elements of the Persuasion Knowledge Model (PKM) (Friestad & Wright, 1994). The PKM proposes that when persuasion attempts, such as advertising, are recognised, this will trigger two types of coping strategies. First, a low-involvement habitual negative reactance strategy, such as ad avoidance (East, Wright, & Vanhuele, 2013; Friestad & Wright, 1994). This suggests that when ads are more recognisable, because they contrast with the program (e.g. talk ads in a music program), they are more likely to be avoided. So it is important to test whether average radio ad avoidance varies according to content type, such as music versus talk. Other factors from the literature will also be tested, such as: listener age, time of day (daypart), and amount of listening. For example, Sensation Seeking Theory argues that younger people desire higher levels of stimulation and so may have a higher average rate of channel switching than older radio listeners (Carrol, Zuckerman, & Vogel, 1982). Second, a high-involvement and potential positive response to advertising; consumers see each ad on its merits (Stafford & Stafford, 1996). Since theory and evidence provides only limited guidance for hypotheses, the following research question is proposed:

Does mechanical avoidance of radio ads vary with content type, age, time of day, and heaviness of listening, as heavy consumers tend to have larger repertoires? (Romaniuk & Sharp, 2016).

RQ1: What is the rate of radio channel switching avoidance on average, and does it vary by: (a) content type, (b) age of listener, (c) daypart, and (d) amount of listening?

Proposed Method

The rate of mechanical avoidance will be collected electronically using portable people meter (PPM) technology. This technology is used to observe radio listening more accurately than the traditional diary method. Panel participants are given a small listening device that detects human-inaudible signals embedded in radio programs and ads. The device records the station and time in a log file, every 30 seconds. The authors have negotiated access to a sample of these PPM data from the US. These PPM data will be used to estimate audience loss during ad breaks, and how this differs across dayparts, content types, and age groups. Typically, these data are reported at the aggregate level, but as discussed above, aggregation obscures individual-level exposure. It may be possible to acquire individual-level PPM data to reveal how radio advertising mechanical avoidance varies across light and heavy listeners, and benchmark avoidance in terms of seconds of exposure to the average radio ad.

Implications

By testing whether these benchmarks reliably vary across variables such as content type and daypart, guidance can be given to media schedulers about the best times and places to buy radio spots. Consequently, the results will address calls for models of advertising effectiveness to explain the interactions between listening context and ad scheduling (Romaniuk & Gugel, 2010). In summary, this research will advance academic understanding of radio listeners' strategies for coping with advertising.

References

- Abernethy, A. M. (1991). Differences Between Advertising and Program Exposure for Car Radio Listening. *Journal of Advertising Research*, 31(2), 33-42.
- Bellman, S., Schweda, A., & Varan, D. (2010). The residual impact of avoided television advertising. *Journal of Advertising*, 39(1), 67-82.
- Callius, P. (2008). Advertising avoidance: The quiet consumer revolt. *Sifo Research International*, (1).
- Carrol, E. N., Zuckerman, M., & Vogel, W. H. (1982). A test of the optimal level of arousal theory of sensation seeking. *Journal of personality and social psychology*, 42(3), 572.
- Dix, S., & Phau, I. (2010). Television advertising avoidance: Advancing research methodology. *Journal of Promotion Management*, 16(1-2), 114-133. doi:<http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/10496490903574013>
- Dix, S. R., & Phau, I. (2017). Predictors of Commercial Zapping During Live Prime-Time Television. *Journal of Advertising Research*, 57(1), 15-27. doi:10.2501/JAR-2017-010
- East, R., Wright, M., & Vanhuele, M. (2013). *Consumer behaviour: applications in marketing* (2 ed.). London: Sage.
- Friestad, M., & Wright, P. (1994). The Persuasion Knowledge Model: How People Cope with Persuasion Attempts. *Journal of consumer research*, 21(June), 1-27.
- Generali, P., & Kurtzman, W. (2015). *The Components of Tuning Occasions: Switching vs. Turning*. Retrieved from United States:
- Lin, C., Venkataraman, S., & Jap, S. D. (2013). Media multiplexing behavior: Implications for targeting and media planning. *Marketing science*, 32(2), 310-324.
- McDowell, W., & Dick, S. J. (2003). Switching radio stations while driving: Magnitude, motivation, and measurement issues. *Journal of Radio Studies*, 10(1), 46-62. doi:10.1207/s15506843jrs1001_6
- Nelson-Field, K., & Riebe, E. (2011). The impact of media fragmentation on audience targeting: An empirical generalisation approach. *Journal of Marketing Communications*, 17(1), 51-67.
- North, N., & van Muers, L. (2004, June). *Radio zapping*. Paper presented at the ESOMAR Radio Conference, Geneva.
- Romaniuk, J., & Gugel, C. (2010). The ARF 360 model: Update to a human-centric approach. *Journal of Advertising Research*, 50(3).
- Romaniuk, J., & Sharp, B. (2016). *How brands grow: Part 2*. Melbourne: Oxford University Press.
- Sharp, B. (2010). *How Brands Grow*. Melbourne: Oxford University Press.
- Sharp, B. (2013). *Marketing: Theory, evidence, practice*. Melbourne: Oxford University Press.
- Speck, P. S., & Elliott, M. T. (1997). Predictors of Advertising Avoidance in Print and Broadcast Media. *Journal of Advertising*, 26(3).
- Stafford, M. R., & Stafford, T. F. (1996). Mechanical Commercial Avoidance: A Uses and Gratifications Perspective. *Journal of Current Issues and Research in Advertising*, 18(2), 27-39.
- van Meurs, L. (1998). Zapp! A study of switching behavior during commercial breaks. *Journal of Advertising Research*, 38(1), 43-53.
- Warc. (2016). What we know about TV audiences. *Warc Best Practice*(November).