

WHAT'S HOT

August 2019



ATHLETIC



The build up to the Premier League was exciting for the usual reasons; can Liverpool go one step further this year? Will the newly promoted teams stick to their philosophy? Will the circus at Newcastle ever stop? However, the most interesting day, on social media at least, was August 5th. This was the day that 57 sports journalists announced that they had joined the Athletic.

Coming over from the US, the subscription-based, non-ad funded, football-focused outlet has caught the attention of Football fans and journalists. It created huge buzz in a period where football content, which already dominates newspapers and social media alike, was growing even larger. Podcast powerhouses The Football Ramble and the Totally Football Show went daily, Paddy Power [‘trolled’](#) the UK with their sponsorship of Huddersfield Town, but nothing has reached Athletic’s impact.

The question which now stands is whether Athletic is able to continue standing out within the over-saturated sports journalism market and whether a subscription model is sustainable. Its current growth suggests it’s on the right path, with the [announcement](#) that it hit over 500,000 subscribers in the US in June having only launched three years ago. However with [£10 million invested](#) into the UK launch, including a huge advertising campaign in London, we will be able to make a much better judgement once new subscriber figures are announced in a couple of months’ time.

Aside from its own success, we also need to consider the impact that it is going to have on the news industry as a whole. It isn’t a secret that the last few years have seen a systemic shift of news brand moving their focus online. ‘Clickbait’ headlines on Twitter to drive a user to the sports site, to initiate ad revenue, has become the norm and, in general, this has turned people away. The Athletic is clearly confident that users will happily pay a subscription in order to gain access to quality content and avoid ads and clickbait, but will it work?

There isn’t a direct comparison to draw on within the UK. However, we can look at The Sun’s [reversal on their paywall](#) and The Guardian’s, [albeit seemingly successful](#), request for donations as two major publishers who don’t believe the subscription model is effective for them. If the Athletic does achieve what its aims, will we see a further downward trend in ad revenue and therefore output on other news titles?

There isn’t the evidence so far to say whether the Athletic will have long-term success in the UK, and we eagerly await any sort of release of subscriber numbers, although its likely these will only be released if it’s good news. But if we consider the US funding, the recruitment of high-quality journalists, the unique method of Football content distribution, and the vast audience eager to consume football news all suggests that it should thrive. But, hey, this is football. Anything can happen.



WHAT DO YOU MEME?: ROUND-UP FROM THE LATEST QT



There may be 12 days of Christmas, but there are more gifts to be found in the 12 waves of the QT – our proprietary tracking survey, which has now seen us track the state of the nation, alongside various topical trends, since November 2016.

Within the latest report we have looked into the nation's feelings on Brexit in a post-Boris-as-PM world, attitudes to sustainability after the move by Zara to shed their 'fast fashion' tag, and into whether Brits really get product placement.

One of the most on-trend, overused but under-researched topics we put to the great British public this wave, however, was the dual force of .gifs and memes.

What is a meme? Broadly speaking, it is a captioned image intended to be humorous. They tend to poke fun at a cultural symbol or social idea. As a growing social currency for the millennial and Gen Z cohorts, we were intrigued to understand just how much the wider UK population actually buys into the concept of these visual communicative devices, and therefore whether they are something brands should be wholeheartedly throwing themselves into.

Firstly, only 16% of Brits claim they regularly share memes, but 24% claim that their friends regularly share them – so it seems its an activity where more are happy to lurk than participate.

For a whopping 51% of 18-24s, they feel that sometimes memes can be more effective than just words. Indeed, for this cohort, 36% feel that memes are an important way of sharing culture.

Not everyone shares the love, with only 2% of the 65+ cohort claiming to share memes themselves. This doesn't mean they don't appreciate their use, and

actually fewer of them feel that memes are inappropriate in a professional environment, than those who spend their days using them.

Memes – and their partner in crime, .gifs – are a great opportunity for film, TV and music personalities to further spread their content far and wide. Gemma Collins' new ITVBe show was announced with the statement "The Queen of Memes is back!", and Facebook has subsequently been flooded in recent weeks with her unique facial expressions paired with hilarious captions.

ITV have previous form, having used their Love Island stars' funniest moments to produce 'official' memes seeded out through social, helping their content infiltrate audiences who may have otherwise not watched the show, and their contestants' best bits live on beyond the summer.

But what does this *meme* for other brands?

There is a captive audience for meme and .gif content, and this is largely the hard to reach and engage 18-34 group, with a specific heartland in young men.

Nonetheless, as with most internet phenomena, it is an area to tread carefully within.

Brands which have already jumped on the emoji and UGC bandwagons have been met with mixed reviews, and in the same way that no-one wants to wear the same jumper as their geography teacher, you can bet that 'uncool' brands trying to place in this space will be burned.

They may even find themselves the subject of their very own meme.



KNOW YOUR ABCS: MAG INDUSTRY REPORTS RESULTS



Every six months the Audit Bureau of Circulations (ABC) release the latest circulation figures for the consumer magazine market – and each time the industry braces itself for more bad news.

The release months – February and August – have typically been the key focal points of the year for all magazine publishers, and advertisers, to assess how well magazine brands have performed, with results reported both year-on-year (YoY) or period-on-period (PoP).

According to the latest results, the women's lifestyle market has seen some growth, with Tatler's total print and digital circulation rising by 0.1% to 79,109, while Stylist grew 0.2% to 404,392. Harper's Bazaar recorded the largest growth over the first half of the year, up 1.1%. However, the other 14 titles within the sector all saw declines.

Following the closure of ShortList last year, the men's lifestyle sector is now led by Men's Health magazine – but the title saw a significant -11% drop year-on-year, also proving the difficulty of staying afloat in the male market.

TV listings boast strong numbers with TV Choice circulating 1,122,207 and What's On TV at 778,348 – but these both reported declines this month.

After a quick read, the results look relatively bleak, with most sectors having had another tough year, as they continue to see falling circulations.

However, it is worth noting that magazine brands have evolved – it is no longer only about distribution of physical copies, as publishers focus on increasing their presence across multiple consumer-facing touchpoints.

Digital presence via social in particular has become increasingly more relevant; in addition to brands now putting on live events, hosting awards and more.

Through these new ways to engage it is becoming apparent that ABCs are no longer a complete reflection of a publisher's true brand reach.

In line with the shift away from focusing solely on the ABCs, Marie Claire in particular announced they were moving to an annual release of figures which will be published in February 2020.

After pledging to shake up their newstrade strategy by removing covermounts and reducing cut-price tactics, they believe that reporting an annual figure is a more accurate reflection of the brand, and its value.

As the print market continues to evolve, magazine brands will seek new ways to grow loyalty and increase their following.

Their reach should ideally be taken in the context of their wider touchpoints – however our ability to measure the impact of this remains fairly limited. Until this changes, the ABCs will remain the most accurate publication of data.



TURNED OFF?: BROADCASTERS LOBBY FOR LONGER AD BREAKS



TV audiences may be about to see an increase in the number of ads being shown on mainstream channels, in a move spearheaded [by ITV and Channel 4](#).

The government is said to be in consultation with the broadcasters to discuss the possibility of extending the current cap of seven minutes of advertising per hour, increasing to a maximum of between 8-12 minutes during peak hours.

The decision reportedly comes as a result of falling advertising revenues among UK commercial broadcasters and amid increasing pressure from subscription (SVOD) services.

Whilst it is easy to understand why C4, ITV and other broadcasters are keen to take action to address falling revenue, their latest attempt has missed the mark slightly, offering a short-term solution to a longer-term issue.

By extending the current ad-break minutage, broadcasters risk ruining the immersive viewing experience for audiences of linear TV. According to Ofcom's [Media Nations](#) report, released this month, 51% of Brits are already unhappy with the current level of ads shown.

C4 previously faced criticism in 2017 when Prue Leith, the newly-signed presenter of the Great British Bake Off, [advised viewers](#) to fast-forward through the show's ad breaks, which saw the channel having to defend the amount of advertising within the programme.

The viewing experience for audiences remains paramount. In particular when facing competition from

SVOD services, mainstream broadcasters should continue to focus on quality content to engage viewers, which in turn ensures the best environment for brands to reach audiences effectively.

With viewing habits changing, some audiences are becoming less likely to routinely watch linear TV for extended periods of time, opting instead to tune in only for specific shows, or shifting their viewing habits towards online video.

This new way of watching means viewers are fitting TV consumption around their lives, as opposed to the other way around. Extending ad breaks may only discourage these viewers from watching linear TV – which could have a longer-term effect on the market.

While TV remains the stand out channel for reach, brand safety and ROI, there is no denying that viewing habits are changing, meaning that VOD's role in the media landscape is becoming more prevalent than ever.

BVOD has gone from strength to strength in recent years, allowing access to the increasingly illusive goldmine of light TV viewers and younger audiences. Meanwhile, continued development in technology allows for greater targeting and more accurate access to specific audiences for brands.

The onus is on broadcasters to further develop the offering, allowing for agencies and brands alike to integrate BVOD alongside linear TV more effectively.

Broadcasters should focus on incorporating BVOD into a wider holistic video offering, rather than squeezing more ad revenue from the current model.



STEPS TOWARDS SUSTAINABILITY



It's becoming increasingly well known that the fast fashion industry is a large source of pollution: every year over [80 billion pieces](#) of clothing are produced worldwide and three out of four of these garments will end their lifespan in landfills or be incinerated. The remainder will be recycled. As well as generating high amounts of waste – criticism of fast fashion includes the use of toxic chemicals that are hazardous to the environment and the excessive water consumption needed to produce an item of clothing.

However, it appears that change is afoot, with many fast-fashion brands now making public moves to reduce their negative impact on the environment.

At their 2019 annual shareholders conference fashion giant Inditex (the holding group behind high street favourite Zara and other brands including Massimo Dutti, Pull & Bear and Bershka) announced their plans to transform the business into something more sustainable. Inditex pledged that by 2025, all of its eight brands will “...only use cotton, linen and polyester that's organic, sustainable or recycled,” which make up 90% of the raw materials they use. They also detailed plans to transition to zero landfill waste and renewable power sources, aiming for them to make up 80% of the energy consumed at their offices, distribution centres and stores.

ASOS has also joined the sustainability conversation – having recently curated an ethical and sustainable collection called Responsible Edit. This new category available online features ethical products ranging from clothing to homewares, across a number of well-known brands. Pieces are made from recycled goods and sustainable fibres all produced with less water and waste.

This also comes as H&M group and Marks & Spencer have made information about their sustainability targets publicly available.

However, some premium brands like Stella McCartney have been flying the flag for more ethical practices for the best part of a decade. So what prompted the recent changes in fast fashion strategy?

The answer can be found in the next generation of shoppers. Gen Z's passion for the environment is well documented, and it appears to be influencing their approach to fashion. “A 2017 study from NDP Group found that Gen Z is willing to spend as much as 10 to 15 percent more on sustainably produced clothing. Meanwhile, a Nielsen study from 2015 found nearly three-quarters of 15- to 20-year-olds would pay more for a sustainable product, compared to just 51 percent of Baby Boomers.”

Gen Z also expect their brands to stand for something – for companies to create brand value by the functional, emotional and societal benefits they provide. 89% of Gen Z “would rather buy from a company supporting social and environmental issues over one that does not”. Although brands must be careful, when purpose is treated as a bolt-on, and this isn't weaved fully into the business model it can easily sound inauthentic.

Brands would do well to remember that the spending power of Gen Z is in its infancy, and to build for long-term success. Considering Gen Z will be the world's largest consumer group by 2020 it will become increasingly more important for brands to take a hard look on what they stand for, whether this is sustainability or otherwise. By connecting with this group, brands will see themselves in positive stead for the future.



HOTLINE

THE STORIES THAT LIT UP OUR MEDIA WORLD THIS MONTH



Global radio is launching five new stations, starting with Heart 90s. This will increase Global's offering which currently holds 9.7 million listeners on Heart alone. The remaining stations will launch nationally via DAB digital radio and Global player. These stations will focus on a specific era or genre of music as part of Global's "brand-led strategy".

YouTube is experimenting with an algorithm change within the UK to reduce the spread of false and extremist content. Similar trials in the US resulted in a substantial drop of up to 50% of recommendation lead views what the company calls 'borderline content'. This trial will roll out across many English language markets.



We may have entered the streaming age but cinema advertising is on the rise. The market is expected to reach \$4.6 billion in 2019, a rise of 6.8% from last year. Cinema's resilience is in part due to its experiential nature, but perhaps more importantly cinema-goers also feel positively towards ads.

Tumblr, one of the internet's flagship microblogging platforms, is being sold off by the US telecommunications company Verizon. Tumblr has been used by the likes of Frank Ocean and Taylor Swift, but more recently has been the subject of controversy after a ban of adult content on the platform. Automattic, who also own Wordpress.com, will acquire Tumblr and hope to create a 'more fun web'.





**BANK HOLIDAY
HEATWAVE**

**NOTTING HILL
CARNIVAL**



**GREAT BRITISH
BAKE OFF**



**END OF SUMMER
HOLIDAYS**



**TUMBLR SOLD AT
A LOSS**



AMAZON ON FIRE

