

Data Salon #10 Briefing:

April 30 2021

Topic: Facing off Facebook

Host/Location: Online

Speakers:

Gaven Morris - Director of News, ABC

A discussion about the news media engagement on social media platforms, the impact of the recently passed News Media and Digital Platforms Mandatory Bargaining Code, and what it could mean for cultural institutions.

The Salon began with review of past data salons convened by Lizzie and Keir, and then a handover to Megan and Rory.

Rory gave a brief intro into about the context of the new law and Facebook's subsequent shut down of news sources on their platform:

<https://www.vox.com/recode/22287971/australia-facebook-news-ban-google-money>

Megan introduced Gaven Morris - Director of News at the ABC, who gave a data-filled presentation on how the ABC reacted to being shut off from Facebook for several days. Key points included:

Audience fragmentation is growing with growing social media platforms, and the ABC needs to be where the audience is.

Facebook provides the ABC with the opportunity to reach the majority of Australians. In 2020, ABC reached three million Australians per month on Facebook, and published 16,000 Facebook posts on average each month in 2020, generating nearly 100 million monthly engagements. Social media is the third largest source of website traffic for ABC, behind search and direct. The vast majority of social traffic to the ABC is from Facebook.

Facebook is the most common social platform for accessing news, used by 39% of Australians. By comparison, one in five Australians use YouTube for news. Younger Australians are the most likely to use Facebook as a news source: nearly half of Gen Z do so, compared with 30% of people 74+. Furthermore, Gen Z are more likely than older generations to have only one news source – potentially Facebook.

There is a trust issue though with information on Facebook, and the ABC has been tracking Australians' trust in news sources over recent years. In 2020, only 36% of Australians trust the information they see on Facebook. This is much lower than other sources. ABC ranks highest, trusted by 78% of Australians, while 68% trust search engines. Trust in Facebook as a source of information is lowest among Australians aged 50 and over.

When Facebook banned news sharing in Australia, ABC responded with direct-to-source messaging on other platforms including the website and Instagram

Audiences were advised to download the ABC News app and subscribe to newsletters. The ABC News app had its second largest daily gain in new users to date on the first day of the Facebook news ban

The ABC News app gained over 160,000 new users over the six days of the ban, and there was also massive spikes in new followers on Instagram and Twitter. But there was a big loss in referral traffic without Facebook. Since the ban was lifted, news brands have been posting less on Facebook... and traffic remains lower than before the ban

If we were to have ABC news blocked on Facebook forever, it would be more challenging to reach lighter news audiences. Some people don't have enough interest in news to seek it via direct sources.

Overall traffic would be impacted to some extent, with the loss of these lighter audiences. The impact would be felt across digital news publishers, to varying degrees depending on each brand's reliance on social traffic.

Discussion Topics:

Segmentation of audience - What are the benefits from breaking up your audience segments on social media? Better traction, but this comes at the cost of spending more time making and preparing content for these different channels. This also led into discussion of getting rid of different channels and focusing on content that could reach all different types of platforms. I.e. Gaven said that Four Corners is now designed so that its content will have reach across all ABC platforms, and the most popular article of the week is usually a Four Corners article.

Moving away from FB - investigating how much time and effort goes into content on social media. Lots of feedback on insta being the best for engagement and driving ticket sales. Orgs have found FB to be useful for FB groups.

Trust of News on Facebook: Is fake news an issue in Australia, and would FB raise the profile of paid journalism on the feed with this new bargaining code? Gaven revealed that FB and Google strategies will be to create a new 'news posts listing space' for the news media content. Ideally it would be integrated into social feeds, as this may in fact lessen the audience that sees media posts, however the social media giants approach is the section it off from the aggregated feed.

RIP Twitter - the audience for twitter in Australia is generally too small for us to focus on, and the nature of the platform is you are only talking to your own circle - it doesn't really have broader reach.

About the Data Salon:

The Salon series provides a unique forum to share experiences, strategies, and tools for leveraging data across the Sydney Culture Network (SCN). With invited talks, discussion and show-and-share opportunities the salons explore how data-led research and innovation informs a holistic view of audience experience and institutional practices to influence daily decision making, strategic planning and sectoral collaboration.

The data salon is co-convened by Rory McKay and Megan Lawrence, with input from the SCN Data Working Group. The salon is held bi-monthly on the last Friday of the month.

Future salon locations and topics for 2021:

If you have topics or speakers you'd like to suggest, or your institution would like to host future salons, please contact Rory rorym@slm.com.au or Megan megan.lawrence@australian.museum

Future salon dates for your diary:

Data Salon #11 Unsettled - Our untold history revealed

Location: Australian Museum

Time: 12.30pm - 2.00pm, June 25th, 2021

Dr Markio Smith, one of the curators of Unsettled - Our untold history revealed joins us to discuss the community survey that informed the exhibition themes and the extensive consultation process towards understanding our shared past. With more than 80 significant cultural objects and over 100 contributions by First Nations peoples across the country, Unsettled illuminates the power of truth-telling to realise change.