

The Debating Group



A Parliamentary forum for Media and Marketing Debate

Is Britain's favourite screen now mobile?

According to David Black, Director of Branding, Google UK, there are twice the number of mobile phones activated in this country per day than babies born! He gave this amazing statistic, when proposing the motion 'Britain's favourite screen is now mobile' at the Debating Group debate on 27th January 2014 at the House of Commons. The debate was sponsored by the Internet Advertising Bureau and chaired by Austin Mitchell, MP for Great Grimsby.

David Black claimed that people check their mobile phones last thing at night and first thing in the morning. The average smart phone user checks his phone 100 times a day! There is now a word for fear of being out of mobile phone contact – nomophobia. Penetration of smart phones in this country is 62% of the population, with tablets catching up at 50%.

He argued that the mobile phone is Britain's favourite screen because it is the most entertaining, the most personal and useful device people have. Each of these criteria would enforce the argument; together, they make it clear.

David Black sees the mobile phone as an entertainment hub. With a mobile phone you can watch great TV programmes, choosing when and what you want to watch. You can watch something else at the same time, when others are watching a programme in which you are not interested. You have HDTV in the palm of your hand. When your TV had broken down it is annoying, when you lose your mobile it is devastating! You are actually engaging with your phone when you use it. 53% of us multitask, using another media at the same time. People still engage with their mobiles while watching TV.

With the mobile you are in control. It is the centre of your life, enabling you to have your friends and family with you in the room. David Black cited the number of people looking at popular videos and TV programmes and sharing them with others.

He pointed out that it is the most personal device, a reflection of who you are. On TV you see other people's lives, social media is about your public life, the mobile phone is your personal life.

It is also the most useful screen. You can do so much more with it than with other screens. You have the Internet in your pocket. It has more computer power than the computer that sent the first man on the moon! And a survey of newly-weds found that brides were more concerned about losing their mobile phones than their wedding rings!

David Black asked the audience which device they could manage without: their TV set or their mobile phone.

Irrelevant Claims

Opposing the motion, **Tess Alps, Chairman Thinkbox**, pointed out people in the TV industry love the mobile phone industry. They are not adversaries. Every industry has a right to revel in the phenomenal growth of the mobile screen. Mobile screens are helping people watch more TV, in and out of the home. BARB has, to date, only measured TV viewing on TV sets in the home. But this month it starts publishing the stats for TV viewed on non-TV set devices. Early estimates suggest it will add about 2% extra viewing via mobile screens.

Tess Alps pointed to the powerful relationships developing between the TV set screen and the mobile screen. Multi-screening is a well-documented, perhaps over-hyped phenomenon – it's something that a lot of people do a bit and a few people do a lot, but there is no doubt that it is great news for TV. Screens watched via the TV screen provoke strong reactions and the mobile screens give an outlet for those feelings. They enable participation and interaction, whether voting someone out of the jungle, posing a question to a politician on Question Time or simply using Twitter to express the joy of watching Mushy overcome his stammer in *Educating Yorkshire*. From the TV's industry point of view, mobile phones have turned TV advertising into a point of sale medium with viewers able to search, compare and even buy the product they see in an ad break before it's over. "So what is there about mobile screens for TV not to love?"

Tess Alps stressed that this was not a TV versus mobile 'dingdong'. Nor was she taking a dictionary definition of 'favourite', but simply addressing the commonsense understanding of what it means to be the 'favourite'. She also compared any use of electronic screens, not just the use of mobile networks or apps or just smart phones, but any use of portable screen, even it that's making voice calls or accessing the web via Wi-Fi on a laptop.

However, for all the wealth of data that are available on mobile device ownership and growth, it's not that easy to get hold of robust and impartial figures for how much time people spend using their mobile screens. The official industry data come from the IAB-supported UKOM, conducted by Comscore, and they quote 13 minutes daily use of mobile screens, by which they mean smart phones, tablets and phablets. Laptops are lumped in with desktop PCs at 78 minutes daily, but if we take 75% of that number (which is the approximate laptop ownership according to the Ipsos Techtracker for q4 2013) and add it to the 13 mobile minutes we get to a total of 72 minutes daily. Ofcom puts the daily use of a mobile screen of any sort at 79 minutes. A survey conducted by O2 and Samsung solely amongst smart phone users covering everything from voicemails to SMS, apps and accessing mobile web via phones and tablets reported 119 minutes daily. Watching TV on a screen at home, measured by BARB is about 4 hours a day, all of it done in people's own time for pleasure. Of course, more TV screens are watched in offices and pubs that BARB does not count. If time spent with screen is a meaningful indication of its popularity then TV screens are at the very least twice as popular as all mobile screens added together. However 'favourite screen' is meaningless. Many people in the UK enjoy a plethora of electronic screens from big outdoor ones to hand-held ones. Real people are adept at getting the best out of their array of available screens and they make sensible choices to optimise them for different tasks.

Tess Alps is in no doubt that TV screens are the nation's favourite for watching TV and watching TV is the nation's favourite way of relaxing, accounting for a quarter of all our waking hours. The emotional bonding that partners and families enjoy watching a TV is enormously important to them. Being together, sharing an experience in front of a big screen is sometimes more important than the programme itself. So, one of the very qualities that makes TV screens valued, its shareability, is much harder to recreate with a personal device.

However even with 4 hours daily use Tess Alps would not claim that TV sets are Britain's favourite screen overall. Cinema screens can't claim volume of use, but they make up for it in intensity. Mobile screens cannot compete on quantity or quality. Nor does multiple functionality equal favourite. "If you asked people which screen they'd choose if they could only have one, it's perfectly reasonable to choose a mobile one, much as the Swiss Army knife might be the implement of choice if you had to

take just one to a desert island, but it hardly ranks as a favourite gadget in normal circumstances...how relevant is it that people carry their mobile screens on their person and reach for them several times a day. I could say the same for my hanky”.

Tess Alps’ biggest problem with the motion is that it is yet another one of those irrelevant claims that sheds no light on mobile advertising and gives no insight to the average marketer. “If you support this motion you will just be encouraging the mobile industry to continue to be obsessed with hierarchy, trying to win a race that only they are running in, rather than doing some proper research that is genuinely helpful to advertisers”.

Embodied Cognition

Seconding the motion, **Dr Simon Hampton, Lecturer in Psychology, University of East Anglia**, compared the use of multiscreens, with the use of windscreens in cars. Although nothing replaces windscreens, the driver is monitoring other screens all the time. He compared the driver’s headspace with that of the mobile device user. He conceded that it is a generational phenomenon, but suggested there were three main attributes of mobile phone usage which supported the motion.

Embodied cognition. This thesis holds that the nature of the human mind is largely determined by the form of the human body and people’s behaviour is determined by the body’s interaction with the environment. Examples of this are the Gallic shrug; the conductor with his baton; the instinctive tendency of children to paint with their fingers. This theory can explain people’s intuitive behaviour, and Simon Hampton suggested that the mobile phone is now part of people’s embodied cognition.

Cyborgs. This suggests a being with both human and mechanical parts, as when a person cannot be separated from certain implements e.g. a writer and his pen; short-sighted people with their spectacles. It is a means of out-sourcing the self. Many people have this relationship with their mobile phone. It is part of them and a loss is devastating.

Memory Map. The mobile phone has become a personal record and diary.

This human behaviour in relation to mobile devices is not just logistics, but personal choice. Mobile phones are about self-identity and are a biographical reflection of ourselves – our lives are on our phones. They are the site of our actions – where things are done and a mirror of our lives.

This human behavioural phenomenon has happened very quickly and is crossing generations.

TV Experience

Seconding the opposition **Nigel Walley, Managing Director, Decipher**, compared the mobile phone industry with a needy younger brother. The industry has to make claims against its older brother, the TV industry. He pointed out that mobile phone users often use WiFi which they receive from a TV supplier, so that it is possible to have a TV experience on a mobile phone! The mobile experience can in fact be set up by the TV industry. When a mobile is used interactively with a live broadcast, the primary experience is delivered by the TV industry on a TV screen.

The dictionary definition of ‘favourite’ is ‘preferred to all others of the same kind’. A mobile experience is secondary or tertiary to the primary TV experience. Seeing a film on a 55” HD server is infinitely preferable to seeing it on a 5” Nokia phone. According to Nigel Walley the mobile phone is useful for talking to his grandmother but it is not a ‘media moment’.

P & G’s Roisin Donnelly, one of the brightest people in the media, with support from some of the best, most expensive media analysis anywhere in the globe, puts 80% of her money onto TV. Creative directors shooting advertisements in the Caribbean, envisage their advertisements on a 55” TV in the corner of a lounge, not on a small Nokia phone. Advertising producers are interested in the big screen.

The mobile phone is edging in to make the case as a family favourite, but it has not yet grown up. “Next year is the year of the mobile”.

Discussion from the floor

There were contributions from the floor both for and against the motion. Several contributors referred to the effect of mobiles on their teenage children. One son changed his attitude when his girlfriend dumped him by phone. In another case the father got ‘brownie points’ when he was photographed with a YouTube celebrity and could send these photos to his daughter, giving her hours of pleasure and making her the most popular girl in her school! For a boy of 17 the mobile was the most practical screen. Another contributor was concerned that the mobile phone had become a drug. According to Simon Hampton, it is possible for people to become addicted to mobile phones. Another contributor was concerned with *what* her daughter is watching and felt the mobile phone is safer.

For the motion:

- Mobile apps have achieved retail popularity awards.
- P & G’s ad expenditure could be questioned. TV used to promote smoking. Something that is done today may not be correct. We need to educate people.
- We still do not understand the strengths of the mobile phone. It is a very interactive channel but it is not easy to understand the gaps. In the future we will know its strengths.
- The mobile can empower people e.g. Egypt and Syria.

Against the motion:

- TV is available on the big screen and is the favourite as per the three ‘fs’: frequency, functionality and fear. TV does what it says on the tin. The mobile phone does not.
- The House of Commons has not always been televised. TV is not only entertainment but part of the democratic good.
- What is a favourite? The favourite is what is appropriate for what we want to do at a particular time.
- We are here because of a commercial imperative. We cannot yet monitor the impact of the mobile. The media industry is struggling with what the mobile industry is doing to make mobile a more relevant media.

Neutral

- In the US the industries are working together, particularly with voting systems and games. Looking at the future, we have to see a connected TV market. The mobile phone is a platform, not a medium.

Summing up

Summing up for the opposition **Tess Alps** expressed her regret that the debate was about TV versus the mobile. The mobile is fast-growing, versatile, personal, portable and connected, but it is not a ‘favourite’ screen. It is wrong to blame TV for smoking. TV was the first medium to ban smoking ads. She also commented that online brands spend 70% on TV.

Tess Alps argued that the motion was unsupportable in terms of time spent, quality of experience – both physical and emotional – for the biggest screen activity in the UK and not even true for Britain’s advertisers. The motion is also dangerously irrelevant and if carried, will only feed the mobile’s needy obsession with being crowned No.1. Opposing the motion would not be declaring some other screen is Britain’s favourite in mobile’s place. It would simply be saying that stating that *any* screen is Britain’s favourite is fatuous. If you support the proposition you will be encouraging the mobile industry to put its energy chasing meaningless status, at the expense of helping advertisers use these screens better. You will be ignoring the realities of our multi-screen lives and the fact that these different screens each offer something unique.

Tess Alps found Simon Hampton’s research on how mobiles are being used almost as an extension of our bodies fascinating, but questioned whether the same approach could be used for limbs. Most

people are lucky enough to enjoy the use of 4 limbs and find that life works brilliantly if they use all 4 together but in complementary ways. Would you ever ask 'which is Britain's favourite gender: men or women?' The future of human race depends on men and women being different, while liking each other, respecting each other and playing nicely together. It is interesting to wonder how much less mobile screens would be used without the stimulus people get from cinema, outdoor, TV and even desktop screens. The mobile industry should not be talking about supremacy, but about integration and collaboration.

Summing up for the motion, **David Black** re-iterated the mobile's usefulness e.g. as a map, as an alarm; its entertainment value; and its function as a personal device. He asked the audience to give their phones to their neighbours and check how they felt. It is so personal that it feels uncomfortable to pass it to another person.

The result

The motion was defeated.

Next debate

The next debate will take place on **Monday 24th March 2014** sponsored by the International Advertising Association. For more details contact Doreen Blythe, Debating Group Secretary, on 020 8202 5854, e-mail: doreen.blythe22@btinternet.com www.debatinggroup.org.uk