

PRINT AS A CONTACT POINT IN THE AGE OF DIGITAL MEDIA OR DO MAGAZINE ADVERTISEMENTS STILL FUNCTION FOR INTENSIVE USERS OF THE INTERNET?

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The internet is becoming an ever more powerful medium. According to Internet facts III/08, 64.4% of the total German population have used the internet during the last three months. And in the target group of 14 to 19 year-olds, the figure has already reached 95.7%. Among young target groups, the internet has long become a central base medium. Media habits have changed and with them the lives of people have also changed. Content becomes digital - that on CDs is disappearing and that on MP3 players is displayed on the screen. People conceivably get to know their first mates through the internet and the lovesick cry on the shoulders of their best friends via ICQ chat.

Is print still relevant?

In this age of rapidly changing media habits, not only is shrinking coverage a subject of discussion, but also the question is repeatedly posed as to whether the classical media, and in particular popular magazines, are still effective:

- Do the classical media still deliver enough points of contact – including among those people who are constantly and expertly surfing the net?
- Do classical advertisements in popular magazines offer a relevant platform for adequately reaching a particularly internet-oriented target group in spite of the strength of digital media?

Methodological background

In order to be able to answer these questions of effect, we make use of a special instrument employed in research on the effects of advertising. The G+J Advertising-Effect Panel has since September, 2004, been conducting a quarterly survey of a fixed group of 2,000 people on their attitude to a selection of roughly 220 brands from what are now 22 product categories. Apart from the classical tracking of advertising-effect parameters against time, the identification of the contributory effect of the individual media (with emphasis on TV, print and online) and the determination of a meaningful media mix or distribution of contacts without saturation effects formed the focus in terms of content.

A central role is played here by the panel approach: As a result of the repeated surveying of one and the same person, changes can be measured personally for each individual respondent. As is done in a scientific experiment, distorting variables are kept constant in the before-and-after comparisons. Because of the panel approach, the relationship between the respondents and the brands is made a great deal more transparent than it is in traditional longitudinal studies. Because although fundamental changes in advertising-effect parameters can emerge during tracking with independent random samples, the panel approach permits a more in-depth view of possible motives for change.

The target group of the future: digital natives

In order to formulate statements about the future effectiveness of advertising in popular magazines, we create a target group where we can assume that it is already one step closer to the media behaviour of the future. Here we are dealing with a very online-oriented target group, often defined as digital natives. Digital natives can be described as people who have integrated digitality and virtuality into their lives and who have little or no inhibitions vis-à-vis everyday digital solutions.

Based on our assumptions, we generate the target group of the future with the following profile:

- Media behaviour: People who are online seven days a week
- Media consequences: Approval to the statements: "If I wish to know something, I go on the internet and no longer look it up in a reference book" and "On one occasion at least I have met up with people who I first became acquainted with on the internet" (both statements are intended to emphasize the great digital intimacy of the target group in their daily behaviour)
- Demography: Last but not least, we concentrate on a purely female target group, as the advertising-effect analysis under consideration refers to a female product in the field of skin care.

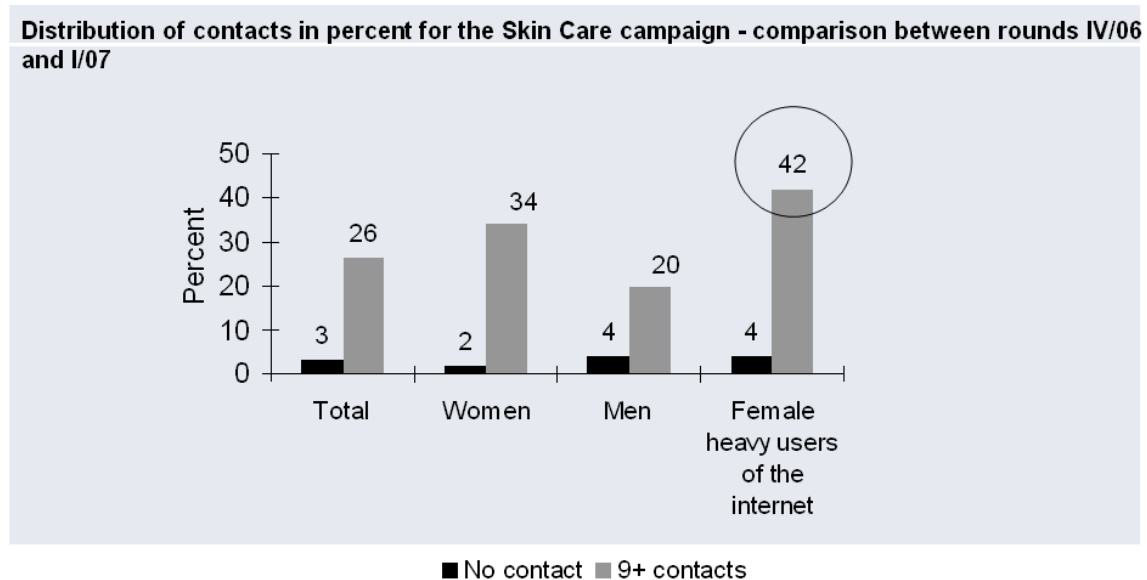
Results: What effects do classical contacts have on the target group of heavy users of the internet?

In order to answer this question, as a first step we take a look at how frequently this internet-oriented target group was reached by a classic TV and print campaign. What is important here is to note that the product campaign in the quarter under review did not include any spending on online advertising.

Diagram 1 shows an analysis of the contacts generated by a well-known face-care campaign. One can see at a glance that the female heavy users of the internet show a visibly greater share of the highest contact category. Even vis-à-vis the female target group, the share is much higher again.

Diagram 1

Female heavy users of the internet are much more receptive...



This first contact analysis makes it clear that it was possible to address the target group through classical TV and print contacts with good effect and in fact with even greater effect than the population as a whole. It is demonstrated here, as in many other analyses, that an expected substitution effect exerted by online advertising on the use of TV and print has so far not materialised. And incidentally, these findings correspond to those established by a series of studies in which heavy internet users are identified as multiple-media users, who not only use online media, but all media comparably to a greater degree.

Coverage alone is not sufficient

In order to answer questions concerning advertising-effect processes, a pure contact and coverage analysis does not go into enough depth. With a contact analysis one can only summarize that female heavy users of the internet have been reached through classical TV and print campaigns. However, one could critically remark that although the target group under scrutiny has been both well and frequently reached, that nevertheless does not necessarily mean that an effect has been achieved, because the capacity for attention of this target group could progressively decline on account of their multi-optional media behaviour: individual stimuli could, therefore, because of the rising flood of stimuli, lose their power. Put in concrete terms, the target group could be overtaxed by the constant and multiple stimuli and therefore less receptive to each stimulus - and consequently also less receptive to every form of advertising.

That is why a consideration of different advertising-effect parameters at brand level makes sense. For this analysis, the most difficult advertising-effect parameter was selected as representative: "The buying activity within the last three months for this particular face-care product".

Diagram 2

Women of action: Buying increases significantly among female heavy users of the internet!

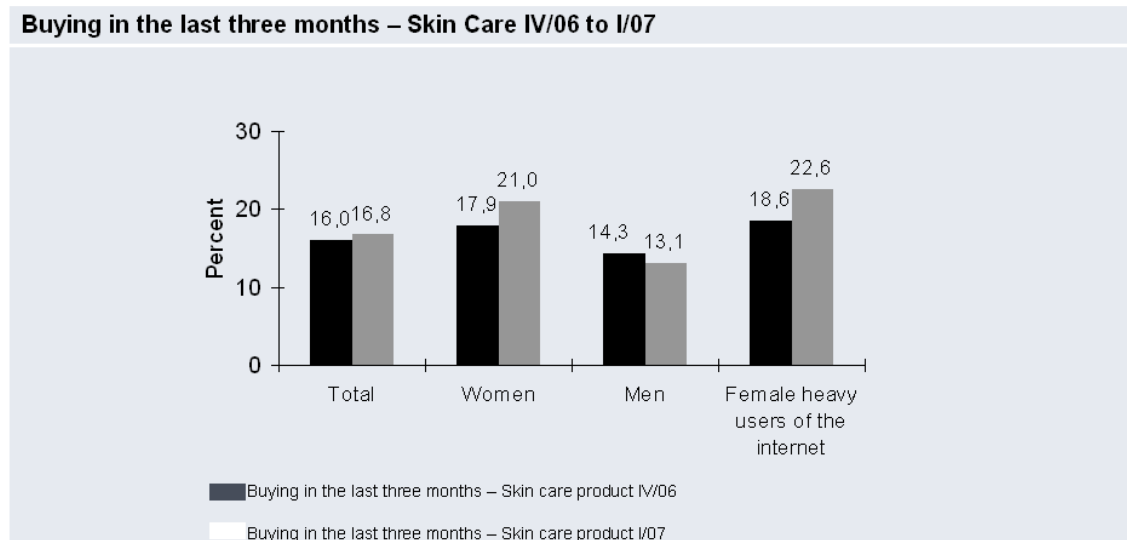
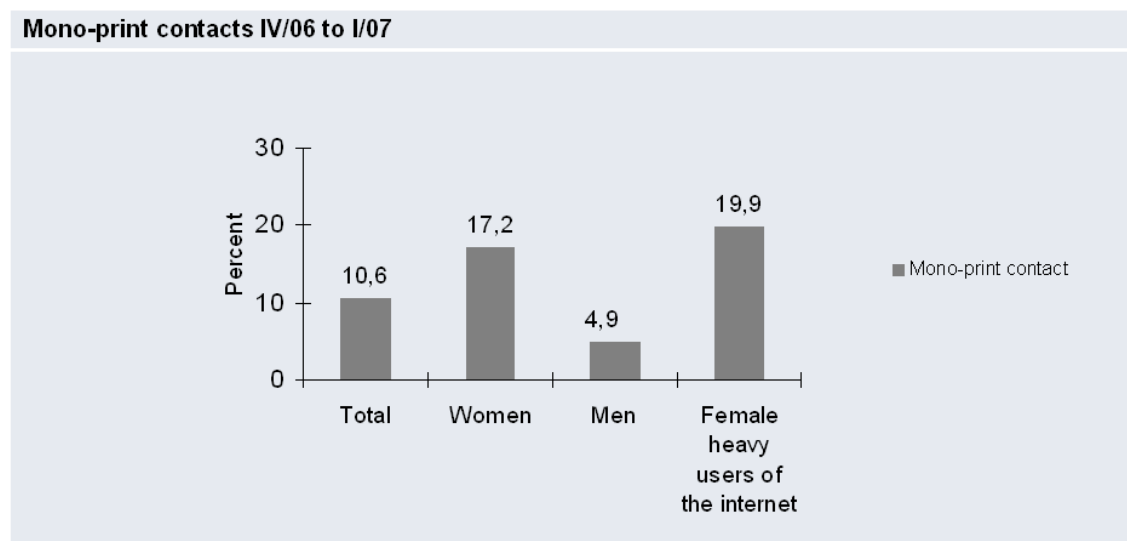


Diagram 2 makes it clear that the female heavy user of the internet shows the comparably highest level of buying activity in the first quarter of 2007. In addition to this, in comparison to the previous survey round, visible increases in buying activity for the face-care product can be identified. For the male target group, buying activity declines, a plausible development, as the campaign focused on a female target group.

A more precise analysis shows that the female heavy users of the internet registered the highest share of media-mix contacts and even the share in mono-print contacts was visibly higher compared to the overall number of respondents and compared to the total female target group.

Diagram 3

Interesting: Female heavy users of the internet register the highest mono-print share



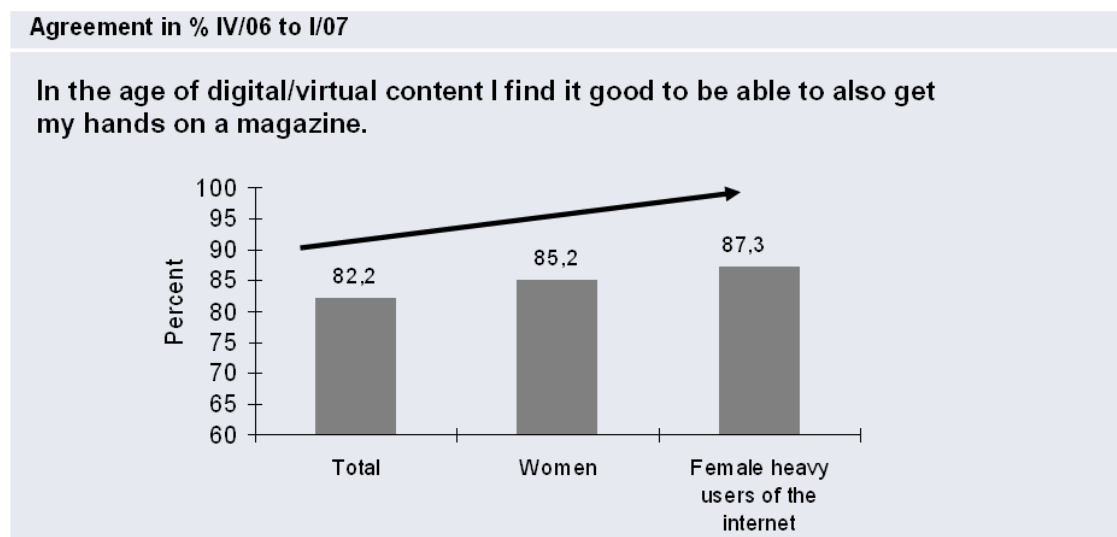
The quality of print in the 21st century

Female heavy users of the internet are evidently still well reached through magazines even in the 21st century. On the other hand, one could critically ask why this is the case. After all, this target group no longer reaches for a reference book but extracts all information relevant to it from the internet. There will certainly be many answers to such a critical question. A more in-depth analysis of the media-usage behaviour of this target group and the associated demands on the respective media impressively shows that popular magazines possess a certain quality for female heavy users of the internet. Where there is interest, for example, magazines are used very intensively and in the process the longer articles and reports are not shunned. This appears to be particularly remarkable in a target group in which members are also often described as modern media scanners, who only skim or skip through texts and are basically always complaining about chronic lack of time.

It is possibly precisely that which the medium of popular magazines is occasionally accused of in some media discourses which is really its most relevant unique selling proposition: because popular magazines really are “absolutely the most analogue medium”. The speed with which information can be communicated is significantly reduced in comparison to TV and online. The printed page with the respective information remains unchanged as long as the reader wishes to look at it and does not disappear with the next click. On looking more closely, it is therefore not very surprising that these female digital natives also react very strongly to the tangible and durable character of a popular magazine.

Diagram 4

Strong approval for the “getting-to-grips-with” quality in a virtual world



Here, the trend researcher Norbert Bolz possibly offers a convincing qualitative explanation for the ongoing affinity to print seen among heavy internet users. In his media ABC, he assumes that the important features which preserve the existence of popular magazines will sooner show a rising tendency, as they dispense the consolation of manageability, reduce complexity and are used as navigation aids in the information environment.

Summary

Heavy users of the internet are both well and very frequently reached through classical campaign contacts (TV and print).

Heavy users of the internet are multi-users and as well as using online media they also use TV and print to a higher degree.

These classical contacts continue to demonstrate their effect, even in terms of the absolutely toughest advertising criterion of all, buying activity during the last three months.

For the digital-native target group, popular magazines evidently provide a certain quality: their “getting-to-grips-with” nature becomes a unique selling proposition in a stronger virtual world.