Cracking the code of Online Readership
or why traditional online metrics don't suffice

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Before the advent of the internet, readers used to be persons that bought your printed issues. In today's online world the term has a lot more bandwidth. Ranging from faithful subscribers (both of printed and digital editions) over truly engaged online readers to the hundreds of thousands of Facebook or Twitter users whizzing by your content without taking note of who is actually providing it. Attributing value to all of those different kinds of recipients and helping to sell them to advertisers is something that current online metrics only do imperfectly.

We have to acknowledge that traffic metrics are a major measure of success for all publishers, sometimes even the only one. But we will have to go beyond Unique Browsers, Visits and Pageviews and also time based values (Time on Site, Time per Unique) and even "Engagement" to understand and segment online readership and attribute value to it. We have to not only understand but also embrace the changes that social networks have brought about when it comes to the proliferation of content. And we will have to explore the limits of what we can sensibly know and what stories we are telling based on the information and insights we are getting from our data.

What it takes is more than just technical measurements. It needs a composed metric that brings together the traditional online audience metrics for publishers, time based measurements, insight into the "usage graph" of the online readers, referring sources as well as claimed "commitment" of respondents. By combining the data available from web analytics and/or census measurement systems with information we collect from panels we can produce true insight into the online readership.
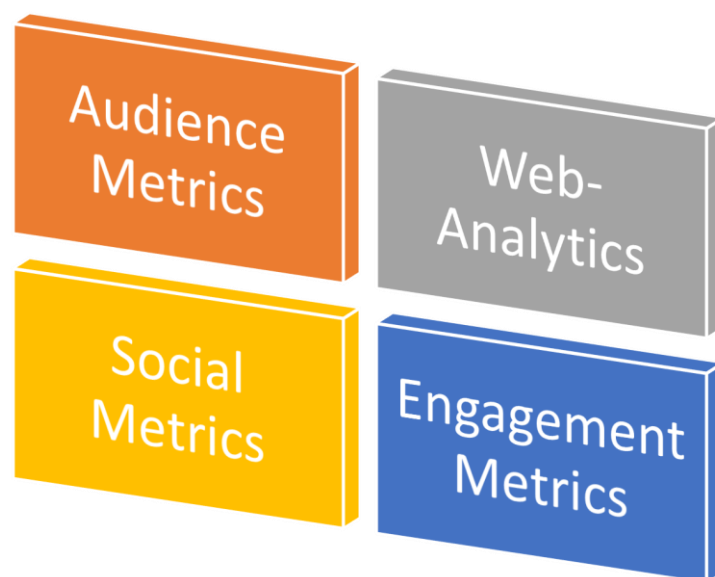
Why online readership segmentation and value attribution matters to your business

- Uncertainty about readership measurement and segmentation slows the growth of online ad spending, with buyers and sellers of media each favoring different and often incompatible metrics.

- The dynamics of media-planning dynamic is reversed in the online world: marketers allocate more resources to campaign optimization as they run, rather than to planning them beforehand.

- Advertising technologies used online, such as behavioral targeting, automated buying processes and real time bidding platforms continue to erode the value of a publisher's audience profile. Increasingly, the decisive information resides not with the publisher (or even the agencies in many cases) but in the databases of intermediaries such as ad-networks, profile brokers, and data exchange platforms

- As a result, despite many currencies having been established already, the online ad industry does not depend on having a single one. In contrast to the world of television or magazines, space for advertising is not a scarce resource on the Internet.

So, publishers can no longer just rely on just being well represented in online audience currencies. They themselves have to segment and to attribute value to their online readers, in order to take better informed editorial decisions, make a compelling case to advertisers and also be able to add value to the real time bidding and automated buying processes that are becoming the norm.
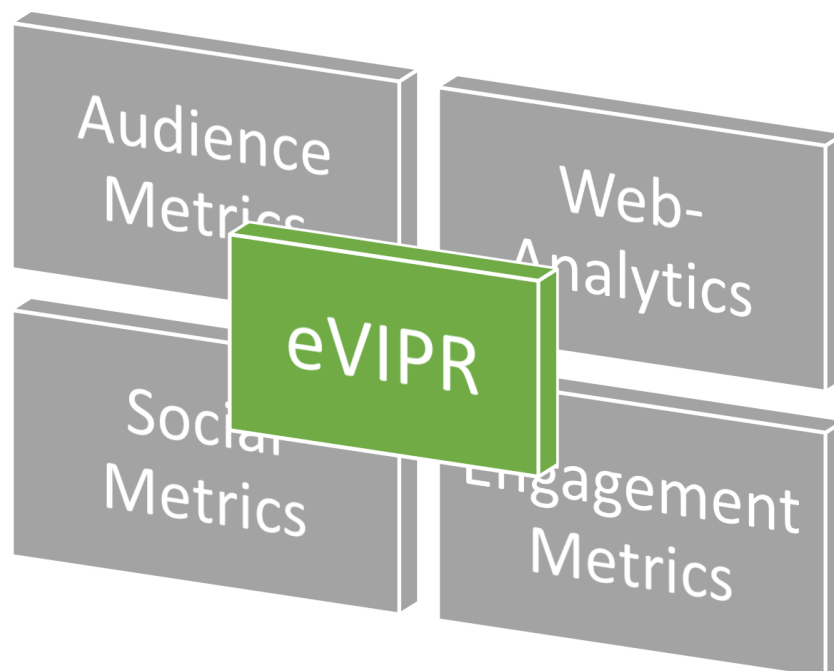
Online Audience Metrics

Once upon a time we all thought that with the internet and internet measurement systems, audience measurement and targeting would be simple. After all, we were able to measure anything and everything: a researcher's dream. It would tell us all about the who, when, what, where and how. While this dream has not turned into a nightmare, we clearly have to admit that, for almost twenty years now, the industry has been flooded with a plethora of metrics that claim to give answers but actually suffer from some notable defects:
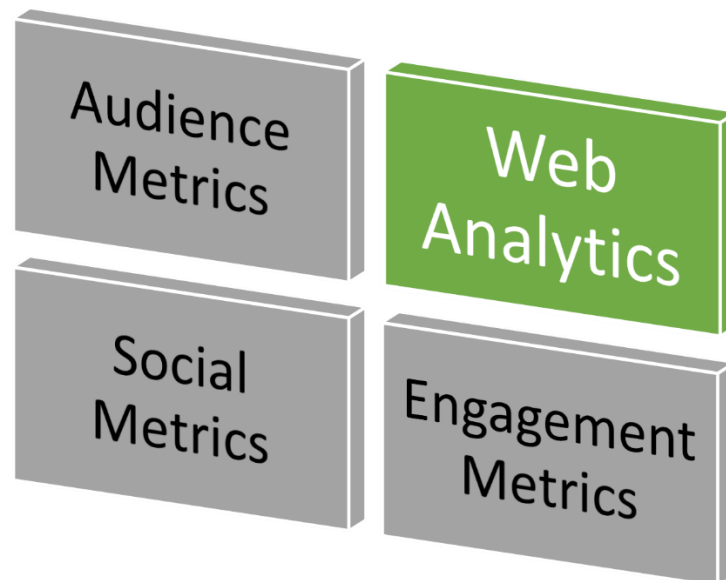
Each and every metric that is out there is either imperfect in its definition or implementation or often misinterpreted or can in some cases be corrupted by media companies. That does not mean that they are useless, it only means that they have to be critically examined and reviewed to make sure they are fit for purpose. This is true for both web analytical systems as well as internet audience measurement systems. All of those metrics below are metrics of a first order and are also used to establish composed metrics (like measures of Engagement) of higher orders. It is therefore essential to be aware of their imperfections and limitations.

Type	Metric	Meaning	Comment
Reach	Page Impressions, Page Views	A metric for the volume of "pages" being viewed on a publisher's website. It is also a relevant input to any "engagement metrics" and other metrics of the second order.	Is the impression of an article, that scrolls across multiple "viewports" to be regarded as a single PV or multiple ones ?
	Unique Browsers, Unique Clients, Unique Visitors	A metric that is meant to be an approximation to devices and "persons".	The definitions between measurement providers vary substantially and different systems use different underlying technical identifiers to constitute this metric. Modern browsers and mobile operating systems make it increasingly hard to set and retrieve persistent identifiers. "Cookie deletion" is only the tip of the ice berg. Moreover all Uniques look the same, no matter if they are an engaged reader or someone just passing by because of a FB referral
	Visits, Sessions	Is defined as a number of consecutive Page Views from one browser with a defined time out. It lies somewhere in between PageViews and Uniques.	Current standards for timeouts do not do justice to the modern navigational behaviour e.g in multi-tabbed environments.
	Users, Persons, Viewers,	A further aggregation of browsers and devices towards actual people. Using passive metering, persistent identifiers and modelling, measurement providers are approximating the number of real persons that are exposed to content (or ads).	This metric cannot be any better than the ones that it is being aggregated from. Getting all devices of a panelist and identification of panelist's vs. non-panelists' usage of devices is imperfect.
Time	Time spent/Attention minutes	This tells us what happens after a page has been loaded. Do users click on right away or do they stay and engage with the content?	Both tag based systems and passive metering solutions are not apt to measure the time spent very accurately. In many cases we only know that a page was open, but not if it had the attention of the person sitting in front of the device.

Web Analytics

Web analytical systems are an indispensable tool to collect, analyze and report data that is specificly collected for your site. Beyond giving you a means of, at least roughly, verifying currency figures, it gives you a deeper insight into the behavior and characteristics of your specific audience.

Type	Metric	Meaning	Comment
Navigation	Search referrals.	Which search engines and which keywords are used to find and enter your site?	
	Social referrals	From which of the social networks are readers being transferred to your content?	
	Portal referrals	Which portals, aggregators and other media are referring to your content?	
Subscription	Paid Subscribers		
	Registered Users		
	Newsletter subscribers		
	App users		
	ePaper subscribers		
Equipment	Device types		
	Operating systems		
	Browsers		
Location/Provider	Geolocation		
	Provider/bandwidth		

Engagement metrics

While most of the providers will agree that a measure of engagement is key, its meaning or its interpretation probably have a bigger variety among the providers' usage and definition as well as in the metrics they are using to constitute a composed engagement metric.

An engagement metric might for example be composed of the following indices:

- Click-Depth Index: Percent of visitors' sessions of "n" or more pages
- Recency Index: Percent of sessions occurring in the last "small n" weeks
- Frequency Index: Percent of sessions re-occuring "n" times over the last "n weeks".
- Duration Index: Percent of sessions of "n" or more minutes

When looking at engagement metrics beyond your own site always keep in mind that:

1. Your brand is different than from all the others

2. Your website is different than all the others

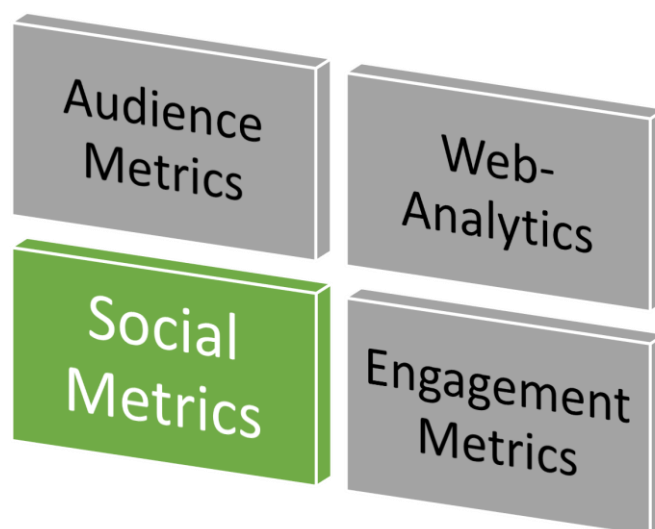3. Site visitors interact and transact differently with your website than with others

Therefore an engagement metric that is to be applicable to all subscribers of a measurement system must be carefully designed to be as neutral and invariant towards the above effects.
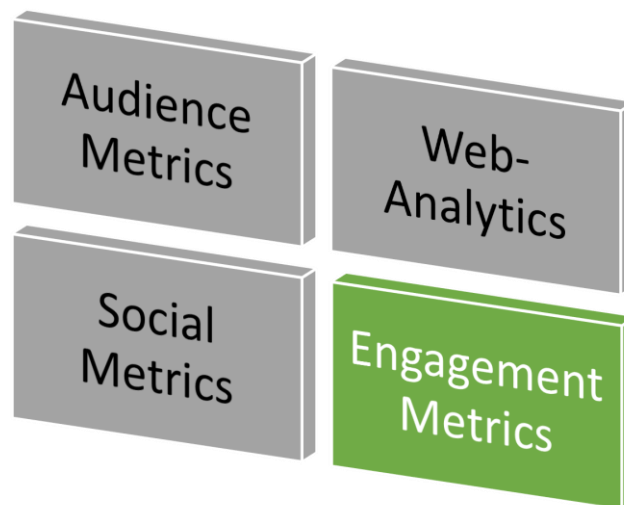
Social metrics

There are varying tools measuring brand performance across social networks that allow you to understand how your content (and hopefully brand) is shared through and commented on the various social networks. It should be noted that there are limits to what most social analytics systems can achieve in terms of gaining and giving insight into the disposition and sentiment towards shared comments.

| Type	Metric	Meaning	Comment
Social Reach and exposure	Number of followers	Reach is the potential audience for a message based on total follower count (Twitter, Pinterest and LinkedIn followers, total likes on your Facebook page, etc).	
	Audience growth	Audience Growth Rate allows you to evaluate your efforts over time, without getting distracted by irrelevant informationl	
Mentions	Mentions	A key social metric you need to track is volume of mentions, which is the size of a conversation	
Social Media Engagement	Retweets Replies Likes Favourites	Engagement measures how much and how often others interact with you and your content on social media. When someone takes the time to like, favorite or comment on your content, they're actively engaging with your content.	
Equipment	Device types		
	Operating systems		
	Browsers		
Location/Provider	Geolocation		
	Provider/bandwidth		

eVIPR

The system we are outlining in this paper (eVIPR) can bring together metrics the above mentioned sources of data to segment your readers into the following groups:
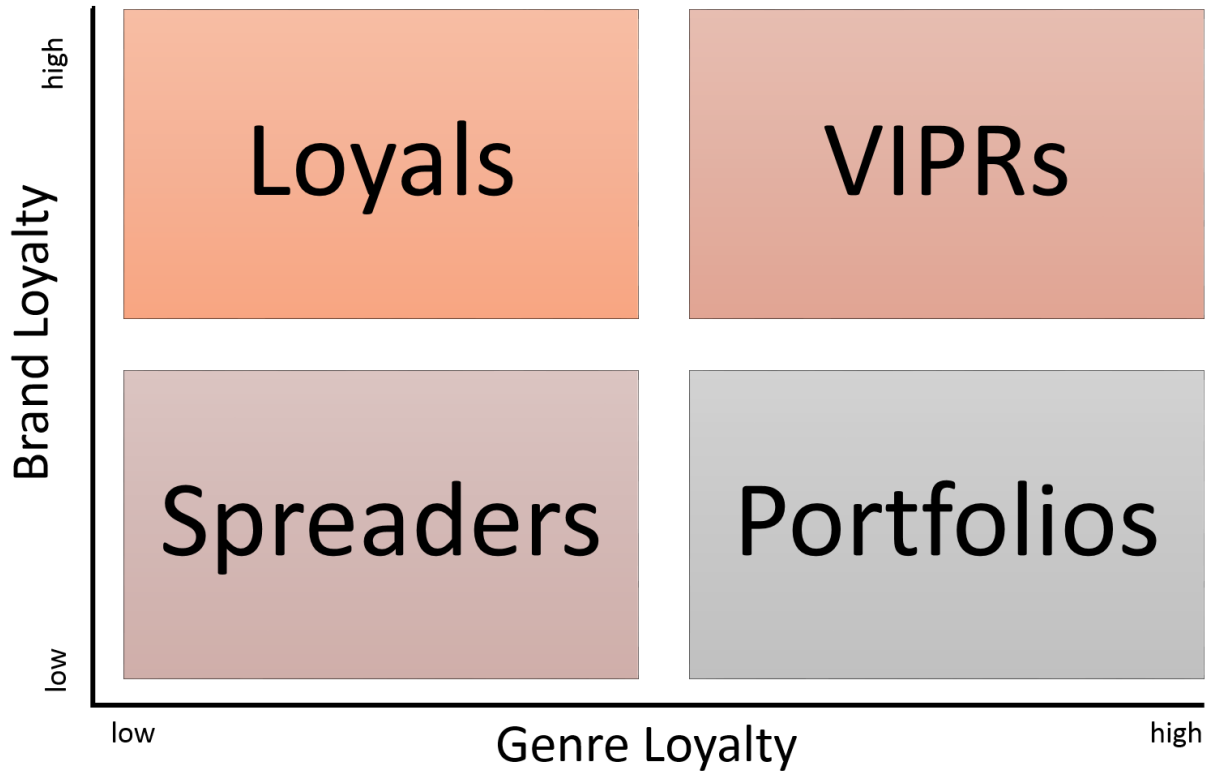

- **Spreaders** engage with your brand among many others across a large number of genres
- **Portfolios** read your brand among a number of others but all within the same genre
- **Loyals** prefer your brand but also engage with other in a number of other genres
- **VIPRS** are focused on your brand and on its genre

eVIPR segments can be combined with other socio demographical or behavioral data to create even more detailed segments:
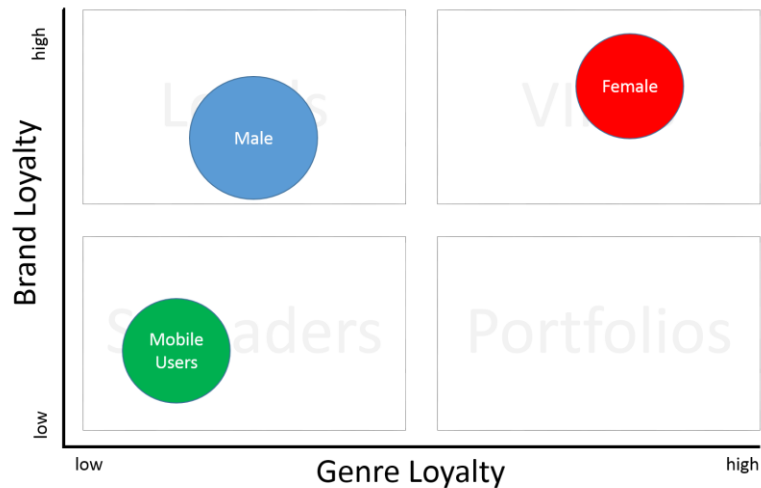
To achieve this, eVIPR imports data from various sources (full census audience system, panel etc.) weighs and submits them to the core analytics system where they are used to create clusters:
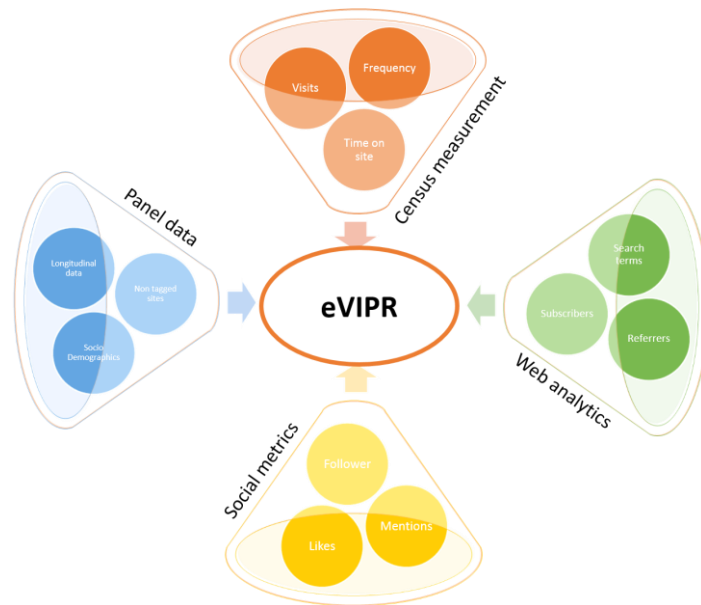
eVIPR can be built on top of industry agreed measurement systems. It will live in a managed virtualized environment, ensuring availability, cost effectiveness, scalability and elasticity. Using ETL-subsystems is capable of importing data from a number of different sources. Data can be either visualized within our tool Instar Analytics or made available to third party system by exposing its information using APIs.