

Alexandra Elena PO TOAC

The Bucharest University of Economic Studies, Romania

Dorian Lauren iu FLOREA

The Bucharest University of Economic Studies, Romania

Dora MORO ANU

The Bucharest University of Economic Studies, Romania

QUALITATIVE RESEARCH AMONG EXPERTS REGARDING THE FREQUENCY OF EXPOSURE

Empirical
study

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Abstract

In order to identify the differences between the theoretical approach related with the processes of media planning and the practical approach of experts from this field, a qualitative research has been done among experts. Besides that, the main purpose of this article is to determine the purpose and methods used by experts in order to establish the level of the effective frequency of exposure. There are several theoretical approaches related with this concept and many models have been carried out by theoreticians from this field, but it's very important to find out how things are really going in practice: do the practitioners consider the frequency of exposure an important media objective and if so, what is their method for establishing the level of frequency of exposure for a particular media campaign? This subject and many others have been addressed to experts in this qualitative research.

Introduction

There are several theoretical approaches related with the role and the level of frequency of exposure. The most important models have been carried out after the collaboration between theoreticians and practitioners. The level for the frequency of exposure can generate significant variations for the media budget, so its implications in practical field are very important.

A relevant example which demonstrates some of the implications that can be generated from a qualitative research is represented by Ostrow model that determines the level for the effective frequency of exposure. This model was elaborated in 1982 after a workshop with both practitioners and theoreticians from Advertising Research Foundation (Belch, 2003). The conclusions from that meeting led to the development of the model that implies setting the level of frequency taking into account 19 factors divided in three categories: marketing, media and copy depending on which the basic level of frequency (3), increases or decreases.

Even though the model is more likely to be an implementation one and less theoretical, its importance is significant because it substantiates the algorithms that underline the software by which the practitioners determine the level of frequency of exposure. So many relevant information and approaches may result from a qualitative research among experts and contribute to the actual study of knowledge (Sissors, 2002).

The role of this approach can identify some aspects specific to the cognitive level, but especially to affective and conative level because the purpose is to understand the way media specialists are thinking (cognitive level), but especially the way they are actually working and making decisions (behavioral level).

An important specification is required: taking into account the measurability of each media channel, the possibility of setting a level of frequency which can be followed the entire campaign, but also the relevance of the media channel from the budget point of view, in the qualitative research it will be taken into account the concept of frequency of exposure for TV.

Methodology

The main problem arises from this qualitative research it refers to the importance that a media specialist assigns or not to the frequency of exposure and the way each specialist determines the level of effective frequency in order to reach the initial objectives (Catoi, 2002).

In addition the purpose was to identify the differences (if they exist) between the theoretical approach related to media planning and the practical way by which the specialists addresses these aspects.

The main objectives of this research are the following ones:

(1) objectives related to media planning:

- the identification of processes, variables and other parameters that characterizes the concept of media planning.

- the identification of the difference between the concept of media planning and media strategy;

- the identification of a starting point regarding the concept of media planning;

(2) objectives related to the process of media planning:

- most important objectives in media planning;

- the correlation between the media objectives and communication objectives;

- the degree in which the results are being measured in order to obtain some relevant conclusions that might help to optimize future campaigns;

- defining the concept of media strategy;

- determination of methods by which a specialist can optimize a media campaign;

- enunciation of some tactical methods of optimizing a media campaign;

(3) objectives related to the concept of frequency of exposure:

- determining the role that experts give to the frequency of exposure;

- the practical way the level of frequency is being established;

Given the fact that the media specialists will discuss about the specific of their work (some of the information being confident), the method used in order to collect the data was the in-depth interview to the detrimental of focus group (Datculescu, 2006).

So the individuals among whom the interview was applied were: media specialists, communication and marketing that are working in media agencies or marketing departments of multinational companies. In addition the individuals were selected taking into account their level of experience because one of the purposes of this research was to understand the concepts from the point of view of practitioners with some months of experience and from the point of view of the ones with more than 15 years of experience. So the sample for this qualitative research was of 12 individuals.

The in-depth interview was conducted with the help of a interview guide. This was structured so that it could totally answer to the objectives of this research. During the interviews, it was noticed that very few specialists were able to approach every subject from the interview guide. So the interviewer led the discussion so that neither of the individuals feel any pressure generated by the lack of experience or knowledge related to one of the approached topics.

Results

The results of the qualitative research showed major differences between the practical approach of specialists and theoretical concepts related to media planning and related implications. First of all there is a confusion between the concept of media planning and the media plan.

Although the majority of those interviewed work or have a direct connection with the media planning field, there are only some few specialists who know the media planning stages. There is also a confusion between the media planning and media strategy (the first one is considered to be a component of the second one).

There is also another interesting thing noticed about the media planning processes. In theory the media planning implies the following processes: (1) media brief, (2) competition analyze, (3) defining or validating the target, (4) media objectives, (5) media strategy, (6) media plan, (7) budget and (8) evaluating the results. In the practical field there are many situations where their chronological order can be different. The budget can be an independent variable, a restrictive one, communicated by the client, depending on the media strategy. In theoretical situation, the budget should be determined depending on the competition media investment, media objectives and strategy.

There is a general belief related to the fact that the media objectives should be correlated with the communication objectives, which on the other side are being correlated with the marketing objectives. Nevertheless there are many practical situations in which the media objectives are not being defined by quantitative parameters: one way because sometimes there cannot be made a translation from the marketing objectives to media objectives or because sometimes the media objectives are not being specified in the media brief. For a media campaign, the most common objectives are related to frequency of exposure and reach.

The definition for media strategy given by the experts is that it represents the way by which the media objectives are met and it mainly implies choosing the media channels, media vehicles and the time schedule for the ads to be broadcast. From the TV media strategy point of view there are some steps usually followed:

(a) choosing the TV channels depending on:
(1) target affinity for each TV station; (2) budgetary restriction - if it exists (3) market share for each TV channel (4) ratings for each channel both for brand target and TV station buying target (5) broadcasting costs for each TV station;

(b) weekly pressure of the competition in terms of GRPs and TRPs;

(c) time schedule and type of media strategy: continuous or in flights;

After establishing the media strategy, the expert will do the media plan in order to met the media objectives. The media plan implies the estimation of some media indicators (number of spots, GRPs, TRPs, GRP'30, TRP'30, affinity, broadcasting cost per spot, total net budget). These indicators are being followed during the campaign in order to achieve at least their minimum level specified in the media plan, without overcoming the budget.

The optimizing process involves in the first place the campaign monitoring and adjusting it by sending spots cancelations or additional orders to the TV stations, depending on the situation. The purpose is to achieve minim the value of the indicators specifies in the media plan without overcoming the budget. The point is to maximize the visibility of the campaign among the target (maximizing the number of TRPs).

But before establishing any strategy or implementing it, it is very important to have a media objective defined by quantitative parameters. The experts from this field claim that there are several situations when such an objective it is not established in a clear way. Nevertheless the most common objectives are related with establishing a level for the effective frequency of exposure or reach. In practice, there are some situations where the level of frequency it is being established and for that specific level the reach is maximized..

A very important issue is related to the method by which the effective frequency is being established. There are several situations related to this aspect:

(1) the level for the effective frequency is generated by o software developed in this regard. The experts should assign in a subjectively manner a certain value to a series of factors divided in three categories: media, marketing and copy. These factors influence directly the level of effective frequency. The software is based on Ostrow model developed in 1982. The assignment of a value for each factor has a subjective nature so from one media specialist to another can be obtained a different value for the level of frequency of exposure.

(2) establishing the level of frequency taking into account different analyses or theoretical studies. The most common theory among specialists is Krugman's theory from 1972 related to the fact that three exposures are enough in order to determine the buying decision among consumers. The effects from the forth exposure onwards are similar with the ones obtained for three exposure (according with Krugman's theory). Anyway the theory can be considered out of date due to the major changes that have occurred in the advertising landscape: technological development, overcrowding and exponential increase of ad spots to whom the consumers have been exposed, the

changes occurred in consumption behavior and media habits of the individuals. So an optimum value of three exposures represents a general assertion which cannot be applied in any situation because it is not taking into account a series of factors like: brand's category, competition's activity, life cycle of the product, brand awareness, halo effect (if case), ad message novelty, media strategy and so on.

(3) setting the level of frequency based on practitioners expertise. It can be done when there are historical data obtained for a campaign and for a certain level of frequency the results in terms of sales, intention of purchase or brand awareness are known. So when it comes to a new campaign, media objectives can be established depending on the previous data obtained.

None of these three methods is based on an analytical system of determining the level of effective frequency, but from these three methods the one closest to a viable way of determining the level of frequency it is being represented by the software use based on Ostrow model. Even in this conditions, it should be rather seen as a starting point in setting the media objectives.

Limitations

The results of the qualitative research cannot be generalized without having a quantitative research first, in order to reinforce or not the conclusions.

Furthermore, it should be taken into account the researcher's subjectivity in terms of data analyzing and data interpretation.

Conclusion

The general conclusion that arises after having the interviews is that the concept of media planning is seen by few experts as an idea that includes all the processes related to this field. There is among specialists a confusion between the media plan and the process of media planning, even though the majority of practitioners are working or interacting directly with this field.

In the theoretical approach the role of effective frequency is very important. Nevertheless, in practice, setting the effective level of frequency is many times done by practitioners in a subjective way, without any analytical base or even considering theoretical methods without application nowadays due to the economic changes or changes occurred in consumption behavior.

At this moment the most rigorous method of determining the level of effective frequency is by using a software based on Ostrow model. Its shortcoming is related to the method's subjectivity in terms of value allocation factors.

This indicator generates and most probably will generate continuous debates. Setting the

effective level of frequency remains of great interest to all specialists from the field.

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