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Byte size is the right size

Why creative content in entertainment media must be made more snackable!

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Last year, WIRED magazine talked about the 'Rise of the Snack Culture' in entertainment and other creative media consumption. How entertainment is increasingly being consumed in byte sized chunks. Be it Bollywood songs, cricket coverage, TV soaps, video games, fashion and technology trends and the bastardised news available on many 24-hour channels.

Most of us now snack pop culture the same way we enjoy Leher Kurkure or pop corn - in convenient byte-size nuggets made to be munched easily with increased frequency and more speed (and often indigestion).

What really is a byte sized media snack?

Well, it's many things. It's a forwarded sms joke; it's the MTV chito-chat ticker, it's a short Bollywood remixed song, it's a 20 sec viral spoof on a cola ad, it's a one minute user-generated video uploaded on youtube; it's even a non-news-item-number (Rakhi-Sawant-Kisses-Mika) created by the TRP hungry news-channels!!

But why is there such an exponential need for media snacks today?

The answer is not overly complicated and difficult to figure out. For most of us, there is an ever-increasing shortage of time and attention. Time, attention and trust are the main scarcities of this millennium. We don't have time for anything and yet we want to experience everything. Therefore, snacking is the best though sub-optimal experience for most.

Rise of pottering time

In a world where the boundaries of work, play and pottering have almost totally disappeared for many of the white-collared work-force first with the internet and then with the ubiquitous mobile phone, media snacking is the only sane way to keep from drowning in information-overload or from entertainment-anxiety!

A typical work-day for many starts early morning. A browse and respond routine on the blackberry, songs and songlets on the mp3 player while commuting. A constant feast of sms, e-mails, viral videos, RSS feeds from blogs and the Google Reader, active widgets delivering news, trivia snippets, and bytes from videos and music straight to the laptop!!

It's all day munching without ever having a full media meal!! The 30-page newspaper is gulped in five minutes, the three-hour Bollywood movie snacked often in less than 30 minutes, and some 30 e-mails opened and responded in three minutes.

Even for brands, in an increasingly Continuous Partial Attention (CPA) consumer society, byte size is the perfect size for selling, pushing commercial messages or branded content. And perhaps the mobile screen (the third screen as it is called) is the best medium for it.

Mobiquity

In India like elsewhere the ubiquitous mobile phone has gradually created its own parallel entertainment economy. The two biggest passions of India - Cricket and Bollywood are already raking big business from the mobile. Perhaps, the best example is T20 cricket. The format itself is a byte-sized avatar of test cricket.

Through updates, ringtones, caller tunes, mobile gaming, downloadable music, the mobile music market already outsells the conventional music markets by a big margin.

Religion is also a big feed! From spiritual ring tones, to prayers to mobile 'donations' to religious community participation. They are all done on mobile phones! India is expected to lead among Asian countries in terms of mobile gaming revenues as well, with the 2007 figure at around \$80 mn says Gartner Research.

In India TV on mobile is a personalised platform! In most emerging markets, due to space constraints within the home, mobile entertainment may develop as a highly personal edutainment device as well! Therefore, in the near future even edutainment snacks can be served with speed on the mobile platform.

In the nuclear families of the metros and towns, already different family members might be snacking on different

entertainment bytes at any given time.

So while the teenage son catches up on the mp3 remixed music, the mother may be playing 'snake' and the father checking out 'forwarded jokes' and videos clips, each on their mobile phone!

At last count as per a Nov 2007 list on www.wirelessduniya.com, there were some 63 Mobile VAS companies in India and growing... ActiveMedia, BuzzCity, EnableM, Hungama Mobile are just a few names that are benefiting from the snackisation of creative content on the mobile. Traditional ad agency creative departments must expand to accommodate quickly the need for greater mobile content, else like many opportunities this too will pass by them...

UGC

A Nokia NSeries Entertainment Study, 'A Glimpse of the Next Episode' done in 2007, predicts that within five years a quarter of all entertainment will be created, edited and shared within peer groups rather than coming out of traditional media groups!! And a large proportion of that content will be created on the ubiquitous mobile phone.

Be it UGC or commercial content (and the boundaries will keep blurring), the successful marketers and brands will be the ones who master the art of byte sized entertainment.

Social Media

In social media, the relatively new byte sized 'killer app' (inane-activity-and-an-utter-waste-of-time for many) is Twitter. Twitter is a twist on instant messaging. It lets users send short updates about their every move and thought to the cell phones and personalized Web sites of a community, rather than just to individuals! As a Business Week article pointed out - 'Twitter taps into a basic need of many Web users to suck up every last crumb of personalized information'.

In the near future it is this mix of expert content mashed up with UGC and Twitter like social media and slashed into juicy, instantly digestible chunks that will feed the 500mn mobile phones that we have.

Mobiquity will have a huge appetite. And much of it will be for snack sized content and not a full meal! And this brings to another facet of the creative content business.

We will need to learn to remix better and shorter. We would have to repurpose all the content that exists now and in the near future.

New Creative Challenge

There are few boundaries between creative genres anymore. The 150 min movie can easily be repurposed into 5-7 four minute songs, 4 minute mobiflicks, a cartoon strip, downloadable mini-movie series and so on!

Today it's possible for old 'archived' creatives to be re-contextualised for the current times. What about re-contextualising/ re-purposing the popular Yeh Jo Hai Zindagi series into shorter, crisper minisodes; the Bodyline cricket series as snackable 10 minute pre-T20 appetizers...

Therefore, the new creative (content) department must be an enriched hybrid of a 30sec spot writer, a song -writer, a tech blogger, a cricket junkie...Yet all needn't exist under one roof!

The mashed up media content snack requires mashed up thinking in a mashed up environment.

The future of byte-sized entertainment cannot be extrapolated from our collective experiences of the 'full meal' entertainment products .

Byte sized media snacking is here to stay. The choice is how quickly we invent the newer SKUs for the future of entertainment or how long we take to defend our old wares.

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