

150 million people saw your video...says who?

Enough is enough, it's time to reinstate some fundamental discipline around definitions, statistics and sources in media and advertising, writes UKOM's Ian Dowds

I can think of a number of things that are not particularly fashionable to talk about in digital media these days but right up there (or down there, depending on your perspective) is the need for rigour and discipline in the approach to definitions, statistics and the referencing of sources of information for those delivering it, or the need to adjust the value of information relative to its source, for those receiving it.

"150 million people saw this on X [our site/platform]. That's about as many as watched the last World Cup Final!"

To be fair, I paraphrase (but not much). To be fairer, it *was* a pretty good video. To be very fair, it was made by a strong presenter who gave a good presentation that I enjoyed immensely. So what was wrong with that one statement that I heard pronounced on a stage last week at a high profile and highly respectable digital conference? Well, I have some questions and observations for the presenter that are relevant for anyone dishing out or on the receiving end of facts, statistics, opinions and claims.

150 million people saw it. Says who? I don't know. No source was given. If they are your own numbers then say so. It does not mean I will refuse to believe you. It does mean I will put a mental asterisk by the statistic. According to Wikipedia the acronym MRDA is an abbreviation for *Mandy Rice-Davies Applies*, and is 'the internet slang for "well he would say that, wouldn't he?" It is used to indicate scepticism of a claim due to the obvious bias of the person making the claim.* I think that this is an abbreviation that should be adopted industrywide, to be officially and unapologetically used wherever there is an absence of a credible independent source.

Did you even mean 150 million people saw it or did you actually mean that it was seen 150 million times? I've watched Matthew Le Tissier's 1994 goal against Blackburn Rovers about 150 million times**, but I am definitely only one person.

Did you mean the video has been seen in its entirety or do you mean that the 'start' button has been pushed? Or something in between? Or perhaps it was auto-play?

In referencing the World Cup Final you compare the video to what is great shorthand for 'absolutely massive audience' but is also an event that lasts, give or take, about 2 hours. Did your video reach its claimed audience in the same timeframe? Probably not, but I don't know, because you didn't give me your timeframe. I see Susan Boyle's BGT audition on YouTube (that once famous-for-being-a-whopping-big-number statistic) now has more than 200 million views***. Then again, it has taken more than seven years as opposed to two hours.

You favourably compare the claimed 150 million audience of the video to what is widely acknowledged to be one of the biggest global TV events. You are wrong to. FIFA's own figures are that in- and out-of-home TV viewing of 1 minute or more of the 2016 World Cup Final exceeded 1 billion people. In-home viewing of 20 minutes or more reached 695 million people globally. But hold on; those are FIFA's own numbers, and we all know about FIFA's glib approach to numbers don't we?! Actually Kantar Media produce those numbers**** because even FIFA knows that it has to use independent, recognized and rigorous sources for their numbers (well their TV viewing anyway, I couldn't possibly comment on any other FIFA numbers!).

The presenter last week threw out another unrelated statistic as a fact. I won't say exactly what it was referring to but the number given was 10%. The actual source of the data says 30%. That's very wrong.

In the Q&A at the end of the session I corrected a couple of the errant statistics (including the 30% not 10% one) before asking my question. Another panel member stated, light-heartedly, "uh-oh, the stat checker's in the room." Now, I can be dull about a broad range of things, some of which I will apologise for, including Glenn Hoddle's woeful treatment of Matt Le Tissier in ignoring him for England's 1998 World Cup squad. I would much rather not have to be the dullard about digital media statistics, the need for clear definitions and the discipline of source referencing. I promise I don't do it very often. But I might have to start to do it more and I will request that more people do the same. Because it matters.

I spoke to the presenter off stage at the end. I said truthfully that I had honestly enjoyed most of the deck. We laughed and I apologized for singling any individual out, because, in truth I could have called out, for similar ill-discipline, any one a large number of presenters I have seen at events throughout this year.

It is not glamorous but we owe it to ourselves and to all currently in the media and advertising industry, whether with four decades of experience or four months, along with those yet to join this fascinating, challenging and rewarding business, to reinstate some fundamental discipline around definitions, statistics and sources. Am I wrong?

REFERENCES:

*Source: [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/MRDA_\(slang\)](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/MRDA_(slang)) accessed 25/10/15

**Source: Ian Dowds, watched on DVD between 1994 and 2016. Number is a rough estimate which has been exaggerated for effect. You can see the goal here <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pbMAKr6s08Q>, where, as of 25/10/16 it been seen about 2,000 times (BUT not necessarily by 2,000 people.)

***Source: Youtube <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RxPZh4AnWyk> accessed 25/10/15

[http://resources.fifa.com/mm/document/affederation/tv/02/74/55/57/2014fwcbrazilvaudiencereport\(draft5\)\(issuedate14.12.15\)_neutral.pdf](http://resources.fifa.com/mm/document/affederation/tv/02/74/55/57/2014fwcbrazilvaudiencereport(draft5)(issuedate14.12.15)_neutral.pdf) accessed 25/10/15