

MRS Awards 2015

Advertising & Media Research

**Winner**

**Lightspeed GMI**

**BBC Worldwide**

**Tackling the elephant:  
how innovation helped BBC  
Worldwide master emotion**

## SUMMARY

For BBC Worldwide's future success as a business they need to apply reliable consumer-impact prediction in the heart of programme making. But how do you understand what your audiences want across 200 countries? How do you capture and communicate messy, complicated emotions in a way that both investors and creatives will value?

This paper describes how Lightspeed GMI partnered with BBC Worldwide to do just that - by embracing innovation. Testing a groundbreaking approach to content testing, they were able to analyze and quantify the emotions behind the usual survey opinions. In fact, they turned emotion into "science".

As a result of this breakthrough thinking, BBC Worldwide can now plan programming that touches people, consistently, and at great scale. And the international rollout of their new methodology has already begun, spearheading a fundamental shift in organizational culture and philosophy. It's a testament not just to innovation, but to BBC Worldwide's commitment to change, a major achievement for a long-established institution.

## SYNOPSIS

### Quantifying love

Lightspeed GMI partnered with BBC Worldwide to solve one of the most fundamental and timeless questions that creative businesses face: how do you create TV content that people will really, truly love?

BBC Worldwide's long-term business objective is to move to an evidence-based approach to content development. They need development models that help their content teams to create winning programming with consistency.

Faced also with increasingly excellent programming from competitors such as Netflix, time is of the essence. BBC Worldwide has to move quickly to remain competitive on the global stage.

So BBC Worldwide engaged Lightspeed GMI to help them develop a new content testing methodology. It needed to meet some challenging criteria. It had to be cost-effective and work at scale globally. It had to be utterly accessible for number-focused stakeholders – in other words, easily quantified.

And perhaps most challenging of all, they were tasked with supporting the tricky business of creative development without constraining creativity.

The approach would also need to integrate with existing development processes that content specialists use on a daily basis. Considering that BBC Worldwide reaches people in almost 200 countries, it would be short-sighted – and operationally unattainable – to ignore these systems.

### The elephant's guilty pleasures

BBC Worldwide knows from years of comparing actual and claimed behaviour that there can be huge gaps between what people say they think and what they actually think.

People in focus groups declare an unconditional love for history documentaries when it turns out that contemporary reality 'docs' are their real guilty pleasure. And while the respondent is often unaware of their error, the fact is that this 'false reporting' often derails researchers' predictions. Viewers will profess love then not bother watching. Or say they loathe a programme, then tune into it in droves. Hard though it is to believe, 'Breaking Bad' was initially rejected by big US networks based on initial testing, before becoming a worldwide sensation.

To understand this trend, let's consider the human brain. It's now well established in behavioural psychology that what people say they think and what they actually think are very different things. On this topic there's an informative model presented by renowned psychologist Jonathan Haidt. He compares the brain to an elephant and his rider. The rider (our rational brain) labours under the illusion of control but in reality the elephant (our emotional brain) can override rational commands without warning or explanation. Or as the psychologist Daniel Kahneman says, "thinking is to humans as swimming is to cats"!

Conventional content testing doesn't account for the unconscious, emotional response, because it only asks respondents to consciously volunteer answers. Consequently, no existing content testing approach could reliably predict on air performance.

BBC Worldwide would need to break with convention.

### You say it best, when you say nothing at all

Scientists have shown that our emotional responses are more accurately revealed by our faces. The face, it seems, never lies. Our micro-facial biometric signals actually convey the full set of human emotions. And now, cutting-edge new facial mapping technology allows us to actually codify and quantify those signals.

So together with BBC Worldwide, we set out to integrate facial-coding into a radical new approach. Our pilot survey was conducted in September 2014, with 4,657 Australian respondents. This provided an audience large enough for detailed segmentation of results.

BBC Worldwide and Lightspeed GMI engaged the video supplier CrowdEmotion.

Respondents were asked to complete an online demographic, psychometric and media consumption questionnaire. Capturing both conscious and unconscious reactions would allow for objective comparisons. Trailers for 22 BBC shows were shown.

Using screen-mounted cameras second by second variations in respondents' micro-facial expressions were captured. At the same time, respondents' conscious

‘appreciation’ scores for the programming were collected using a carefully designed online survey.

Then facial-coding software was used to interpret the emotional meaning of the facial signals.

And finally, the team devised a standard set of metrics to convert the complex emotional data into simple, high-level, quantified data. This ensured that the findings could be ‘dashboarded’, and easily understood by stakeholders.

“Insight into which audiences most appreciate a show and what a show means to them need to be fed into numerous decisions made at many points in the show’s development and marketing. The only way to ensure the right people have the right insight at the right time is to democratize it – to make it available in beautifully visualized dashboards that make the right decision interpretation easy and the wrong decision hard.” David Boyle, Executive Vice President Insight, BBC Worldwide.

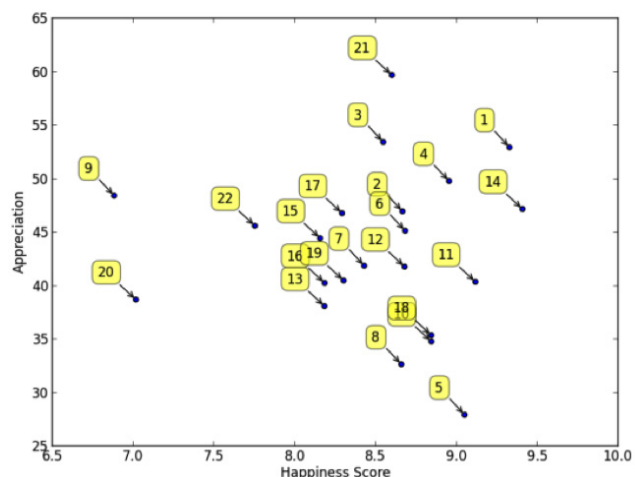
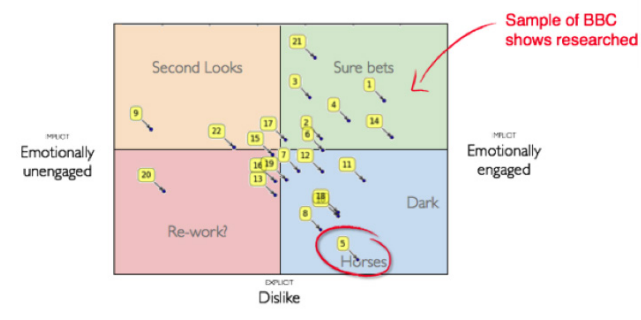
### Facing facts

When the results were in, one thing was immediately clear: there is little correlation between conscious and unconscious opinion.

Let’s consider Show Five: the show that most polarised conscious and unconscious responses.

According to conscious ‘appreciation’ scores it wasn’t liked. It was the least liked show of all 22 tested. 81% of the sample effectively disliked the show: 47% expressed dislike while 34% were undecided.

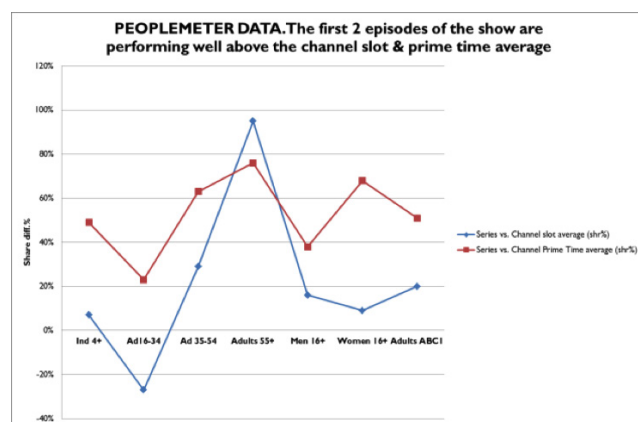
But when looking at the unconscious ‘happiness’ response a different picture emerged. The most hated clip also made viewers happy – happier, in fact, than 82% of programmes tested.



The team had to eliminate the possibility our results were skewed by those liking our clip. Yet Show Five made both the liking and disliking groups happy. Despite some people claiming they disliked it, they did so smiling.

So does that happiness convert into viewership? Common sense says it should, but to be sure, the team checked the on-air performance of Show Five from early viewer share data, captured during broadcast of the show.

Early ratings data from the UK revealed that Show Five in fact outperformed average primetime ratings and attracted significant viewer numbers.



Perhaps our viewers were unwilling to admit a guilty pleasure, even during an online survey when nobody else is around.

And Show Five is not an isolated case. Eight out of the 13 shows that were disliked in the test also made people happy.

What we can conclude with reasonable confidence is that survey-based testing alone is unreliable. The early tests indicate that combining emotion data with survey data is considerably more reliable for predicting viewer interest.

So emotional engagement appears to be a considerably more powerful influence on viewer behaviour than liking. Engage people emotionally and you make content people love.

### Happy viewers, happy business

The BBC Worldwide business is fully committed to the new development methodology and the Australian launch has been followed by an English-speaking territory roll-out (UK, US, Australia) to test key shows for their Showcase event. A fuller scale international roll-out is planned for later in the year. Achieving this commitment is a significant feat considering the vast scale and complexity of the organisation.

And while it's early days, there is plenty of evidence of cultural change throughout the business. Managers and investors are thrilled by the potential for a reliable, evidence-based approach that will make content development less hit and miss. And more accessible.

There's a buzz too among the creative teams. Rather than restrict them, the data gives them the intelligence to make more shows that viewers really love. They appreciate too, the potential for highly specific content refinement - the new approach allows them to identify emotional reactions not just to a programme, but to every brand, series, episode, scene and moment. Regional teams are excited by the potential to segment market-specific data across media, brands, audiences, and markets. And the new approach is directly supporting BBC Worldwide's strategy to incubate and curate emerging digital technology.

The BBC's hard work in creating a radical, rigorous yet accessible model seems to have paid off. And over time it will become even smarter. As they accumulate more data, they will start to build norms to benchmark new development: norms for brands, audiences and regions. They will also start to be able to draw conclusions about the types of content people love. BBC Worldwide will have not just a clever programme validation tool, but a content development tool.

Together, BBC Worldwide and Lightspeed GMI have gone a long way to help create programmes that people really, truly, love. In the words of David Boyle, Executive Vice President of Insight at BBC Worldwide: *"Consumer insight is of paramount importance for us. But it poses a real challenge. We can't work with fluff; we need real, tangible evidence. Quantitative testing always struggles to capture what people really feel, let alone what they'll do. That's why the approach we've innovated with Lightspeed GMI is so remarkable – we've found a way to quantify emotion so that everyone can get behind it. It's really radical for us but also realistic: now we can start embedding it at scale to raise programming quality all over the world."*