

A question of X appeal

Brands pay a premium to reach big audiences, but cutting through is less simple. By Rachel Barnes

Earlier this month, *The X Factor* drew its biggest audience to date, outside a final, when 17.7m viewers tuned in to watch Cher swagger, Katie weep and Aiden pull some mightily unpleasant faces, then cry 'fix' when voted off.

While not everyone will admit to being a fan of the talent show, its appeal spans generations, gender and socio-economic backgrounds. Nintendo says *The X Factor* presents a mass-marketing opportunity in the UK akin to that of the Super Bowl in the US; but just which consumers are represented in this audience, and how do they engage with the show and those brands who advertise in the prime ad spots?

A survey of 1500 viewers of *The X Factor*, conducted this month by research firm Brand Driver exclusively for *Marketing*, found that the show's viewers can be broken down into three categories: 'passive viewers', 'fan voters' and 'fan social networkers'.

According to Brand Driver, this is the first in-depth glimpse of *The X Factor* audience, beyond its demographic composition.

Limited recall

'Those "fan" viewers who are the most engaged with the show have a better chance of remembering the ads,' explains Brand Driver managing director Karen Wise. 'The more engaged that people are with *The X Factor*, the more responsive they are to the ads. This will be reassuring to advertisers, who are looking to grab every opportunity to reach their audience.'

Overall, spontaneous recall of ads during *The X Factor* is low, however. While about half of viewers across all groups were able to recall TalkTalk as the programme's sponsor, other advertisers proved harder to remember – even Nintendo, which has used stars including 2008 *X Factor* runner-up JLS to front its ads, scored only 0.1%.

In fact, it appears that the popularity of the show could be what makes ad recall harder.

'The scale and momentum of *The X Factor* mean that a lot of advertisers are attracted to it,' says Wise. 'As a result, they may lose impact amid the other



The X Factor has pulled in a high of 17.7m viewers to ITV1 so far this series

brands, despite the large audience numbers – they need to fight harder to stand out.'

Yeo Valley's comparatively high recall rate of 2% reflects the 'talkability of the brand' at the moment, says Wise, adding that the 'rapping farmers' in its ad have created content that some viewers will look out for specifically, giving it 'extra currency'.

While the prime-time ad spot is enticing for advertisers, the findings suggest that it may not be right for all brands.

'Advertisers should be looking at buying airtime according to when their core target market has real engagement with a TV show,' suggests Wise. 'Just because there's a bumper audience watching, doesn't mean your ads will cut through. Advertisers should look for programmes that their audience really connects with, which may mean lower audience figures, but greater engagement.'

In addition, brands that advertise around the show should consider whether their target audience is participating in other media, be that *The X Factor* website or magazine, or talking about the show online.

As Wise points out: 'Recall of online ads on the show's website is better than for TV. Where the viewers' interest spills over from watching the TV show, these are the people who remember your advertising the most.' ■

X Factor facts

Who's watching?

Passive viewers

This group is split quite evenly between all ages, but has the highest proportion of male viewers (47%). Only 17% could correctly spontaneously recall one ad, while 45% identified TalkTalk as the sponsor. More than half (57%) of the group did not remember any ads at all.

Fan voters

These are typically female (59%) and under 35, but also watch a lot of TV and have a high income. They also watch *The Xtra Factor* and are four times more likely than average to buy the winner's single. Some 25% were able to correctly spontaneously recall one ad, although 57% remembered TalkTalk as the sponsor. However, 42% could not remember any ads.

Fan social networker

These are mostly female (59%) and predominantly under 35. They watch a little less TV than 'fan voters', but watch *The Xtra Factor* and are four times more likely than average to buy the winner's single. At least one ad was correctly spontaneously recalled by 22% of this group, and 51% knew that TalkTalk was the sponsor. However, 41% were unable to remember one ad.

Who's fronting your next campaign?*

Cher Lloyd Primark 20%, **iPod** 14%
Matt Cardle Levi's 32%, **Audi** 28%
Mary Byrne Fairy Liquid 46%,
Paxo 34%, **Clarks** 23%,
Harvester 20%
Wagner Pot Noodle 21%, **National Express** 14%
One Direction Disney movies 22%,
Pepsi 20%, **iPod** 16%
Rebecca Ferguson Innocent 21%,
Audi 14%
Katie Waissell Disney movies 16%,
Primark 12%

*Respondents were asked to pair X Factor contestants with brands

The X Factor audience profile (%)

