Engaging a Daytime Television Audience via Popular Magazine Programming

A Question of Balance

An Interview with Luke Chilton

Luke Chilton is Assistant Producer (News) on This Morning, ITV’s daily morning magazine programme. First broadcast in 1988, This Morning combines topical news and features, covering a range of subjects from politics to beauty. Previously Luke Chilton was features editor of Real People magazine. He was interviewed by Hilary Bruffell.

Hilary Bruffell (HB): Who is your audience?

Luke Chilton (LC): I think This Morning is aimed predominantly at women and mothers. Women who probably are not going to be at work, full time mums, women on maternity leave and temporarily unemployed women, so we wouldn’t do a lot of things about jobs and bosses, office etiquette etc. because those topics wouldn’t be relevant. We look to cover parenting issues and things that young mums would be interested in: beauty, cookery, celebrity.

This Morning is quite unique; there aren’t many shows on TV with such wide variety of topics. You can have the prime minister one minute and the next minute the woman with the world’s largest breasts. I don’t think there are many shows on TV that have such a wide remit. I think it has quite a unique position in mainstream British TV.

HB: Will you intersperse this with hard news?

LC: We’re trying to be more newsy and topical but this can be difficult at times. A political subject may be important, but people may not be particularly interested in the topic. We’re not a news show, so it’s
a challenge for us. We have to make it interesting and consumable. For us that’s about ensuring the right guests for the show and thinking creatively about how you cover certain items. We try to make every story relatable and emotional by emphasising the human side to it and diminishing the hard fact dimension in it.

**HB: Would you say that the rise in social media has changed how you define the success of a programme like yours?**

**LB:** This is a live show, which is expensive to produce, and that’s why we have a lot of interaction with the viewers, with tweets and emails. That’s why people like watching live TV because a anything can happen and b they think, ‘Well, I can influence this by emailing in or tweeting in and it’s actually happening. I’m not just watching something that’s cold and recorded a week ago.’ I think you get a better relationship with audiences like that. However, you’ve got to be careful because it’s only a certain cross-section of the audience who would use Twitter or Facebook. We look at all the tweets, emails and Facebook posts that come in but you’ve got to remember that’s not everyone. Also you’ve got to remember that negative views are more likely to find their way on to Twitter.

However, we will look at what’s trending on Twitter to see if a lot of people have tweeted about an item. For instance, today we had an interview about a woman who claimed to have been groped by a ghost and we invented a hashtag for that interview for example, #gropedbyaghost. So you can see if that’s trending in the UK and you know if people are talking about it. But that’s only a portion of our audience. You have to remember that a lot of our audience aren’t super tech savvy and there are a lot of people who don’t even use Twitter. So we have to look at more traditional ways of assessing the programme ratings, such as viewing figures, as well.

Assessment is still based on ratings for commercial TV, but it’s a bit different for daytime TV than drama. The whole medium is evolving, so for drama you will measure on demand services such as iPlayer [BBC], ITV Player, other on demand services and Plus1 [services which allow programmes to be watched after a time delay – typically one hour – or on demand]. However, *This Morning* isn’t a show that you would record and watch later because it’s all about the live experience. It’s not a drama, which are the most watched things on catch up [television viewing on demand]; *This Morning* is topical and newsy. It would be a bit like recording the news and watching the news a week later. It’s fresh, it’s immediate and there’s one on every day. It’s kind of disposable TV.