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Monthly insights from your friends
in the marketing research industry.

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RECENTLY AT RPG

the Research & Planning Group

2011 has been a busy year, and it's brought an exciting development for Sean Jordan, our Research Director — on April 6, he and his wife Stacie have just had their first child (a girl), Harper River Jordan!



We're excited for Sean, and we wish his family all the best!

We've been hard at work on both qualitative and quantitative studies lately, and it never ceases to amaze us how common themes will crop up in very different industries.

One of the most common involves the sentiment that customers love to be listened to, and often find themselves frustrated when a service provider, retailer or manufacturer doesn't take their input seriously.

To that end, we've issued a white paper this month discussing how to take customer feedback and funnel it into something useful. You can find it at <http://www.researchplan.com>.

RESEARCH ROUND-UP

57% of US adults say that the government should play a significant role in reducing childhood obesity, says a report from the Pew Research Center. The issue is firmly divided down ideological lines (Democrats and liberals are far more likely to favor government intervention than Republicans and conservatives), but also demographic lines — 83% of Hispanics, 74% of African Americans and 69% of Americans under 30 support the government stepping in to help, while only 49% of Whites and 45% of those over age 65 agree.



Image source: NoHoDamon/Flickr.com

Source: Pew Research Center ([Link](#))



Image source: Microsoft

Restaurants may soon be required by law to print calorie information on their menus, but a report from the NPD Group finds that calorie information has a small effect on consumer behavior. The study compared two groups of consumers, each of whom were given a typical fast food restaurant menu — one with printed calorie information, and one without it. Those who had the calorie information ordered an average number of 901 calories per meal, while those without it ordered an average number of 1021 calories — a difference of only 120 calories. What's more, those armed with calorie information ordered almost as many items (an average of 3.2 items) as their counterparts (3.3 items). The cost per meal was also similar.

Source: NPD Group ([Link](#))

Americans use their TVs an average of 5 hours and 11 minutes per day, according to a November, 2010 report from Nielsen. African-Americans use their TVs the most each day — just over seven hours — while Asians clock in closer to three hours. Most of that television use involves watching live TV. Around half an hour is devoted to daily DVR playback, fifteen minutes is spent watching DVDs, and thirteen minutes is given to video games.



Image source: Microsoft

Source: Nielsen ([Link](#))



Image source: KFC.com

Planning to hire a company spokesperson? It may be good to consider that person's accent, according to a January report from the Harris Poll, which finds that 49% of American adults perceive Southern accents as nice, 47% perceive British accents as sophisticated, and 51% perceive New York accents as rude.

But that's not all there is to say about this issue, because accents tend to be perceived more favorably in their home regions than outside of them. For example, 55% of Midwesterners find their native accent to be pleasant, but those throughout the rest of the country are less likely to appreciate it.

Source: The Harris Poll ([Link](#))

More than half (55%) of all American married couples have been married for 15 years or longer, according to a report from the US Census Bureau. 35% have reached their 25th anniversary, and 6% have reached their 50th wedding anniversary.

The same report finds that first marriages that have ended in divorce lasted a median of eight years, and that half of all remarriages occurred within four years of the divorce.

Source: US Census Bureau ([Link](#))



Image source: Microsoft

THE SCIENCE OF POPULAR MUSIC

by Sean J. Jordan

In just the span of a few weeks, Rebecca Black has gone from being a normal 13-year-old girl to an internet sensation, thanks to a Youtube music video called “Friday.”

On the surface, it’s not much different from the sort of music that plays on the radio; the lyrics are about a teenage girl looking forward to the weekend, the vocals are heavily autotuned, and the bridge features a rap solo. And the video has received over 60 million views – no small feat for an emerging artist.

But “Friday” hasn’t gotten popular because it’s good; rather, the viral buzz is that it’s one of the worst songs ever recorded. When the video was first launched in March, it only garnered a few thousand views.

But after appearing on Comedy Central’s *Tosh.0* blog in a post titled “Songwriting Isn’t For Everyone,” the video has taken off, with millions upon millions of viewers inflicting the video upon their friends and family members. Numerous spoofs, remixes and mash-ups have also been created.

“Friday” is certainly an inept song with annoying and awful lyrics, but what’s interesting about it is that it’s not so different from popular music like Ke\$ha’s “Tik Tok” or Taylor Swift’s “Love Story.” In fact, the primary reason “Friday” is regarded as being such a travesty is because of the popular opinion about the song.

Whereas an artist like Ke\$ha has a marketing machine behind her to reinforce the idea that her music is worth listening to, Rebecca Black has an army of Internet users spreading the word that “Friday” is so bad it’s good.

The phenomenon of a herd mentality shaping the popularity of a song is well known in the musical world, and a 2006 study by Salganik, Dodds and Watts published in *Science* revealed a surprising finding – the popularity of a piece of music (or film, book, TV show or other creative effort) has much less to do with its **quality** than it does with the **perception** that other people like it too.

To conduct the study, the authors created a social network “music market” and recruited 14,341 participants (mostly teenagers or college students) to join.



Rebecca Black, the 13-year-old artist who performed the viral song, “Friday.”

Image source: IREbeccablack.com

Each participant was given access to 48 songs from unknown bands that could be played in their browser and – if they liked the song – downloaded to their computer.

Participants were randomly assigned to a study group. 20% were assigned to a control group where they were forced to rate songs without the input of others, forcing them to think solely about the quality of each piece. The rest were assigned into eight equal-sized groups called “worlds” where their ratings were shared with other users, as were the number of times each song had been downloaded by members of the group.

The expectation of the study was that if quality was truly the reason for a song’s success, certain songs would consistently rise to the top amongst the eight worlds and the control group. But what actually happened was that each group had a large amount of variation from the others, and there was very little correlation between quality and popularity.

What was particularly interesting is that songs that the control group ranked as being intermediate in quality tended to have the most unpredictable quality rankings within the eight worlds, and songs that the control group ranked as high in quality tended to have the most unpredictable market share.

The authors concluded that these social influences played a

large role in individual decision-making than the actual quality of the music. The idea of what was popular took on a life of its own in each of the eight “worlds” – and the results showed that the reassurance that other people like something can be a key shaping influence for an individual to appreciate it as well.

“Friday” is likely to be forgotten in a few months, and Internet users will certainly find another meme to latch onto once Rebecca Black’s 15 minutes of fame are up.

But it’s interesting to think that if “Friday” hadn’t received so much notoriety for being awful, and if a critical mass of Youtube users had rated the video highly enough, Rebecca Black could have achieved a level of success similar to what fellow Internet sensation Justin Bieber has enjoyed.

It’s even more intriguing to consider that so many mega-popular culture icons – *Star Wars*, *Harry Potter*, *Jurassic Park* and the like – may owe their success not just to their relative quality, but also to preferences shaped by a herd mentality. **RPR**

For further reading, we recommend perusing the full report of the cited study: “Experimental Study of Inequality and Unpredictability in an Artificial Cultural Market” by Matthew J. Salganik, Peter Sheridan Dodds, and Duncan J. Watts. *Science*, Feb 2006.

RESEARCH INSIGHTS

IS YOUR ORGANIZATION IN NEED OF VALUE? TRY INTERNS!

by David Rich

You don't have to pay much attention to the news to know that it's getting harder and harder for college graduates to find jobs these days. The current economic climate, along with an increasing need for specialization, has made it difficult for many of those who simply have a college degree to find work in their field.

At the same time, many firms have open positions that are unfilled because of the lack of qualified candidates. These firms often tend to promote internal candidates to these positions, but finding the time to train employees who are already performing valuable functions is difficult, particularly if there is no one ready to move up and take their place.

In our experience, offering internships can provide a wonderful solution to both of these problems.

Our firm has benefitted greatly by opening its doors to interns and recent graduates from our local universities. Interns have brought us new technology, new approaches, and fresh thinking to various aspects of our organization. We've never regretted the decision to bring in an intern.

Some of our previous interns have turned in to valuable employees. Our current Research Director started with us as an intern, and he brought so many new skills to the table that he helped our firm to branch out in new and exciting ways. (For example, this very newsletter is the result of his editorial background and journalistic experience!)



Image source: Microsoft/iStockPhoto

In the 28 years we've been in business, many other interns have come through our doors, and all of them have moved on to have impressive careers.

These are difficult times for someone trying to break into almost any field. Even an accomplished leader or a Fortune 500 CEO had to start out somewhere. We have all been blessed by someone's kindness and willingness to give us a chance to show what we can do, what we can learn, and how we can grow. For many, a career began with an internship.

It is true that the world does not "owe" anyone a guest pass to easy street, but today's young (and maybe not-so-young) entry level candidates are not asking for an easy way in - they just want a learner's permit.

Take stock of your organization and make room for someone who will be extremely grateful for the opportunity you can offer. The cost is low, the supervisory involvement is rewarding (for both the giver and the receiver), and you will be pleasantly surprised at the gifts and talents your interns offer. What's more, you will provide hope to a person just entering the workforce who might otherwise have few opportunities to prove his or her worth. **RPR**

DID YOU KNOW?

The most typical human being alive in the world today is a 28-year-old Han Chinese man, according to the National Geographic Society in its magazine feature series, "7 Billion."

Of course, that typical person only accounts for around 9 million people, or 0.13% of the world's population, and the following statistics reveal just how diverse our world is:

- Mandarin Chinese is the most commonly-spoken first language (spoken by 13% of the world), followed by English and Spanish (each spoken by 5%).¹

- 19% of the world's population is Chinese, while 17% is Indian and 4% is American.¹

- The most common religion in the world is Christianity (practiced by 33%), followed by Islam (21%) and Hinduism (13%).¹

- 40% of the world's population works in a service industry, while 38% work in agriculture and 22% work in industry.¹

- Four in five (82%) adults around the world are literate. Over two-thirds of the world's illiterate adults are found in India, China, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Nigeria, Ethiopia, Indonesia and Egypt, and another two thirds are women.²

- Only 62% of the world's population lives in a country that has a free (or partly free) press. 13% lives in a fully democratic nation, while 38% lives in an authoritarian regime.²

Sources: 1. National Geographic Society
2. Infoplease World Profile

ABOUT US

The Research & Planning Group's experienced and innovative approach to marketing research has helped clients achieve their business objectives for over 25 years.

We are dedicated to helping a wide range of companies and organizations find solutions to their marketing challenges. Our strengths include B2B, health care, service industry, qualitative and quantitative studies.

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