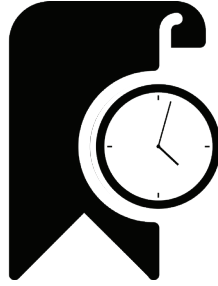


Chapter 11



DEEP DIVING



What's the Non-Obvious Trend?

While our shrinking attention span leads people to consume information more selectively, many people prefer to dive deeply into experiences that truly capture their interest.

“Humans have a shorter attention span than goldfish!”

This was the breathless headline across global media a few years ago when a team of Canadian researchers surveyed two thousand people and found the average human attention span had dropped from about 12 seconds in the year 2000 (when mobile phone adoption was just starting to take off) to 8 seconds in 2016. In comparison, goldfish are believed to have an attention span of nine seconds ... so reporters had their perfect linkbaiting headline.

In response to this new reality, everyone from the media to advertisers struggled to create “snackable” content (as it was increasingly called) for this new reality. My trend report from 2014 explored this through a trend I called *Glanceable Content* – which described the

growing challenge for creators and brands to make their content immediately meaningful at a glance.

This imperative to make content glanceable was illustrated perfectly through the rise of the text-message inspired acronym, TLDR (Too Long, Didn't Read). Over the past few years, though, a curious counter trend has started to emerge. Not everything is too long to read. Some of it is too long to read *now*, but perfect to read *later*.

The idea of TLDR is slowly being replaced (or perhaps augmented) by the nuanced idea of TIRL (Too Interesting, Read Later). In other words, we are all becoming experts at parceling out our time to spend *more* of it selectively with the content that engages us the most deeply in the moments when we choose to make the time for it.

This is the shift at the heart of the *Deep Diving* trend – which explores why people choose to spend more time with some content, how they do it, and why it matters.

Why People Love “Long Reads”

In the middle of 2016, the Pew Research Center released the results of a study to answer the burning question many in media and journalism has been asking for years: is the market for long form content dead?

Most of the media industry has resigned itself to the fact that impressions are still the gold standard for how advertisers buy space, which means unless people get smarter or manage to find new ways to resist clickbaiting headlines, BuzzFeed-style lists and devious 25 page slideshows to find out what childhood celebrities look like today will still be around.

Hardly a desirable future for media.

Thankfully, the conclusions of the study were startlingly optimistic. “When it comes to the relative time consumers spend with this content,” the study concluded, “long-form journalism does have a place in today’s mobile-centric society.”

After months of reviewing 117 million anonymized cell phone interactions with 74,840 articles from 30 news websites in the month of September 2015 – the researchers learned that readers *do* spend about twice the time with long-form news content on their cellphones as with

short-form. Alone that is not surprising considering long form content is, well, longer ... so of course it should take longer to read.

The interesting part came later in the study when they found that “return visitors to long-form articles spent 277 seconds with the article compared with 123 seconds for users overall.” This one finding was key because it also illustrated a behavior that nearly every other study about our attention spans and media length tends to ignore – our penchant to save interesting things and return to them later.

Earlier in this article I called this “TIRL” to describe this idea that timing matters more than we often realize for how long people tend to spend diving more deeply into a piece of media or even engagement in advertising.

One of the smartest early media properties to cater specifically to this behavior was WIRED magazine when they created a section on their website for “long reads” (www.wired.com/tag/longreads). Rather than focus on up to the minute tech news, this section includes a collection of the magazine’s most engaging long articles (regardless of publication date) – from an April 2016 article about Elon Musk’s bold plans for artificial intelligence to a piece about the inspired teaching methods of a Mexican teacher named Sergio Juárez Correa first published in October 2013.

The stories there, despite being originally written for a monthly magazine, have become timeless – and perfect for readers who choose to spend longer pockets of free time engaging with an in depth piece of journalism. *The New York Times*, in response to this growing trend, also recently launched *Insider* – a news property sold as a “digital add on subscription that takes you behind the headlines for an unprecedented look inside The New York Times.”

This trend of *Deep Diving* is extending beyond reading to what we watch on screen as well.

Best. Show. Ever. Watch The Recap ...

For die-hard fans of the 1990s political drama *West Wing*, this past year’s US election cycle has provided a combination of nostalgia and dread. Nostalgia for a show that portrayed exactly the sort of human, wise and

kind President most people dream of having ... and dread because it is fairly clear that an optimistic fictional character like that bears little resemblance to the politicians we will actually get into office.

For years, fans of the show have had to satisfy their nostalgia by watching reruns via internet streaming platforms like Netflix. This past year, though, former cast member Joshua Molina launched a podcast called *The West Wing Weekly* which promised to break down every episode of the hit drama as well as offer new interviews with former cast members and exclusive chats with all sorts of other personalities – including fans of the show. The podcast is offering exactly the kind of *Deep Diving* that new and old fans of the show love to engage with.

A similar example comes from comedians and TV writers Casey Wilson and her longtime collaborator Danielle Schneider, who are huge fans of the reality series *Real Housewives*. On a whim they started recording a podcast together from Wilson's kitchen table about the reality series and its 10 spinoff series in cities around the US and called it *Bitch Sesh: A Real Housewives Breakdown*. The show has become a cult hit.

The popular HBO hit drama series *Game Of Thrones* also has a recap show called *After The Thrones* where the hosts spend an hour dissecting the notoriously complex plot lines of the show and digging into the significance of each character's actions, reviewing scenes, and having exactly the kind of meticulous nuanced conversation about show trivia that only a super fan could love.

What each of these examples illustrates is how small subsets of audiences have a thirst for deep content about the experiences they love – and have a willingness to spend what might seem like an insane amount of time and often money indulging this experience.

Wanderlust For The “Post-Tourist”

Just over a year ago an article by Thomas Rogers in *New York* magazine declared Berlin the “Post-Tourist Capital Of Europe.” At that time the term “post-tourist” was just starting to emerge to describe a growing category of travelers who sought more real experiences while traveling by skipping the usual tourist hotspots, choosing to stay in AirBnbs or local

homes instead of hotels, combining work with travel and immersing themselves in local culture as much as possible.

Berlin was a perfect place to explore the growth of this new type of travel because it was exactly the kind of growing destination where the rapid evolution was on clear display. Though the city has only 3.5 million people, it recently became the third-most-visited city in Europe, after London and Paris.

The post-tourist is one who stays for longer, immerses herself in the culture of a place and engages in a new form of Deep Diving that creates entirely new behaviours when traveling – including a willingness to get lost.

The Kompl app can indulge that desire for wandering by focusing on letting travelers take unexpected journeys by getting lost on purpose. The app uses sources like Foursquare and Wikipedia to highlight nearby attractions, but only shows where a destination is in relation to a traveler ... without any maps or turn by turn directions. Travelers then must explore and find the destination on their own.

The powerful idea behind the app is that sometimes the shortest distance to a destination might not be the most desirable or fun. Being more spontaneous and wandering allows for more serendipity and more interesting discoveries.

This encouraged wanderlust among the post-tourist and is also a perfect example of how *Deep Diving* can impact our real life choices. In a world filled with quick burst experiences, the future of travel seems to be something more meaningful, far deeper, and involving much more willful wandering.

The impact of this goes further than just the travel industry as well. *Deep Diving* is affecting how far consumers go to understand the sourcing and creation of some types of products, or go behind the scenes of entertainment based experiences.

Why It Matters:

While media properties and brands alike have complained about the lack of attention span making it more difficult than ever to earn attention – consumers of information and experiences in all formats are finding

their own ways to identify and spend time with the things they find most interesting and useful. Today, leading edge companies are already understanding where and how to create content tailored for the reader looking for a longer, deeper and more engaging experience. The smartest organizations are leveraging their backstories as a way to engage customers (both B2B and B2C) to go deeper, wander more and have more authentic experiences. Finally, brands in all industries will also start to realize that there is another way to capture attention beyond creating snackable content or paying the most for advertising. The lesson is simple: create something of value, present it skillfully and the right people will selectively spend all kinds of time and money on it.

How To Use This Trend:

- ✓ **Find your backstory** – In many cases, the most engaging content you have is the backstory of why you do what you do and how you do it. TV shows have podcasts and video recaps that take you behind the episode. Luxury brand Hermès launched a film this past year that takes consumers inside one of their silk mills in Lyon France to illustrate how their product is really made. No matter what your story, if you can tell it in an interesting way – there will be an audience interested enough to spend time with you.
- ✓ **Create your own “TIRL” system** – As a consumer of media, you are bound to find stories or interesting content that are too involved to engage with in the moment but perfect to save and engage with later. When I start teaching my class at Georgetown, this is one of the first things they learn how to do. Through a combination of smart digital notetaking and a good old fashioned notebook, they understand how to curate their own content for later consumption.
- ✓ **Inventory your media** – When it comes to existing content and materials that already exist, there may be plenty of past work that could lend itself to extracting or adding more Deep

Diving worthy content. This is a tactic commonly used by film studios that have archival footage and past materials that may be able to experience a second life through online distribution. The point is, great brands understand that sometimes the most powerful content might already have been created and simply need someone to rediscover it.