Online Communication in the Digital Age
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Lecture – 13
Needs of Specific Audiences

Good morning dear friends and welcome to this module. In the previous module, we had discussed the aspects of workplace communication and how to streamline modes of such communication. Today we shall examine the importance of audience within the framework of technical communication.

Who is the Audience?

- Every piece of technical communication targets individuals who will utilize and respond to the information.

- These individuals, referred to as your document's audience, read the content to accomplish a task or acquire knowledge.

- The audience can vary depending on the context and purpose of the communication, but they are typically individuals who have a specific interest, need, or connection to the subject matter.

- The audience in digital communication can further change over time due to factors like market evolution, demographic shifts, technological advancements, and regulatory changes.

- Therefore, adapting to changing audiences is a fundamental aspect of effective digital communication.
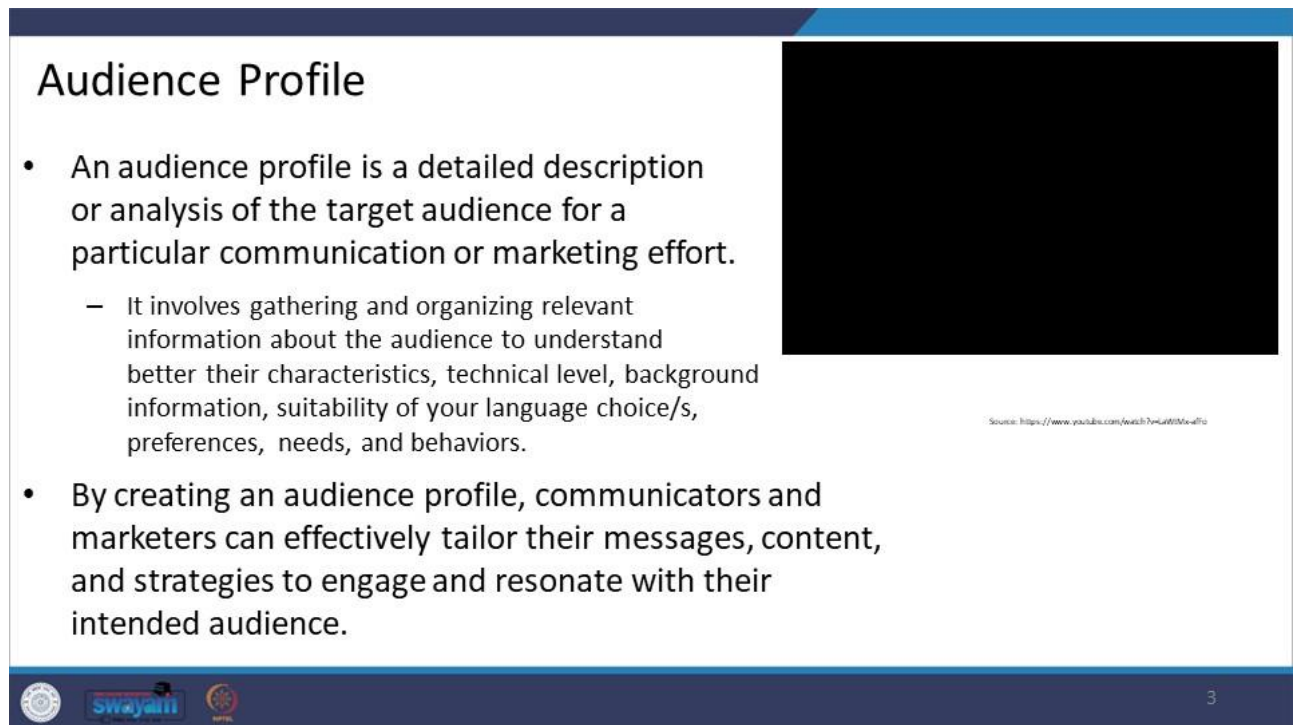
Source: https://youtu.be/okBDQ:D9gYQ?feature=shared

Every piece of technical communication targets individuals who will utilize and are expected to respond to this information. These individuals who are ultimately the audience as far as our document is concerned read the content to accomplish a task, to take a decision or to acquire knowledge. The audience can vary depending on the context and purpose of the communication, but they are typically individuals ultimately who have a specific interest, need or connection to the subject matter.

In the context of digital communication, the audience can further change over time due to factors like market evolution, demographic shifts, technological advancements and

regulatory changes as well as differences. Therefore, adapting to changing audiences is a fundamental aspect of effective digital communication. In technical communication, audience is always very specific. It presupposes a certain knowledge base and requirements within a specific context.

  The requirements of technical communication are vastly different from those of literary communication or for that matter even business communication. To write effectively, it is crucial first to determine and understand the specific audience who will be reading the document. The key to preparing an effective document lies in conducting a systematic analysis of our audience and understanding how they will engage with the content. This involves identifying their characteristics and how they are going to utilize the information which we are providing to them in digital mode and also how well they are able to understand the technologies related with the communication.

 An audience profile is a detailed description or analysis of the target audience for a particular communication or marketing effort.

  It involves gathering and organizing relevant information about the audience in order to understand better their characteristics, technical level, background information they might possess about the communicated message, suitability of our language choices, their preferences, needs and behaviors. By preparing the audience profile, we can effectively tailor our messages, content and strategies to engage and resonance with the intended audience. This profiling also helps in humanizing the target audience and it makes our efforts more personalized. The first profiling is about the technical level of the

audience we shall be addressing to. Are they novices or are they experts or do they have a different specialization? Profiling also includes demographic data such as age, gender, location, education, occupation, income and other relevant factors.

It may also incorporate psychographic information including interests, hobbies, values, attitudes and motivations.

So what are the questions which must be asked in this context? Certain possible questions are mentioned in this slide. For example, who is the primary audience for this document? What is your relationship with the audience? Are there multiple types of relationships involved? And what specific information does the audience require? How familiar are they with the technical details and do the readers have varying levels of expertise? How might cultural differences influence the reader's expectations and interpretations? And how would they interact with the material digitally, on paper or in both ways? We should analyze the audience behavior including their media consumption, online activities, even purchasing habits and social media usage. Understanding how they engage with different platforms and their preferred communication channels can guide the selection of appropriate channels and tactics for reaching and engaging the audience effectively. Also, while creating a technical document, it is essential to consider at least two distinct audiences.
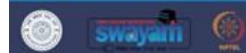
In addition to the primary audience, most documents also have a secondary audience consisting of those individuals who are not directly involved in the immediate use of the information but somehow they are likely to be connected with it.

So the majority of documents are targeted towards the primary audience which consists of immediate readers and therefore this type of profiling is easier. Typically, the primary readers are the document's main users, perhaps even the ones who had requested for its preparation. Let us imagine a software company which has recently developed a new mobile application targeting the fitness enthusiasts. The primary audience for the technical communication related to this mobile application would of course be the end users or individuals who shall be using the app.

Identifying the primary audience is a critical step in technical communication because it allows the communicator to tailor the message, language and level of detail to meet the specific needs and expectations of the intended recipients.

Secondary readers support the project. They offer specialized advice to decision makers or they are the ones who will be impacted by the document in some other way. The support personnel such as customer service representatives or the help desk staff and regulatory authorities and compliance officers, etc. may be part of the secondary audience.

Technical communication may also have a secondary audience of media personnel or public relations representatives who use the technical information to create accurate and compelling content for news articles, press release, marketing materials and different online social media platforms. The secondary audience can also represent certain other fields. For example, they may be financial experts, legal experts, people who are critically looking at the environmental impact of the project, etc. The secondary audience may also have different levels of technical expertise or require specific information for their respective roles. It is essential to consider their needs and expectations when preparing technical communication, ensuring that the information is accessible, accurate and beneficial to all stakeholders, even if they are not the primary recipients.

Purpose of the Document

- Clearly define the specific objectives you aim to achieve with your document and how you anticipate readers will utilize it.
  - What is the primary objective of the document?
  - Are there any additional objectives that the document serves?
  - How do you anticipate readers will engage with the information provided?
- By answering these questions, you can precisely identify the purpose of your document and align its content and structure accordingly.

   We should also be clear about defining the purpose of the document. The specific objectives we aim to achieve with the preparation of our document should be very clearly mentioned right in the beginning of our proposal or draft, etc. We have to think of what is the primary objective of preparing the document. At the same time, are there any additional objectives that the document serves and how do we anticipate readers will engage with the provided information. By answering these questions and similar many other questions, we can precisely identify the purpose of our document and align its content and structure accordingly.

   In addition to the primary purpose, many documents also have one or more secondary purposes. For instance, in a typical instruction manual, the primary purpose is to provide guidance on assembling or using a product. However, companies also include secondary purposes, which are driven by ethical and legal considerations, such as ensuring the safe usage of the product. For example, a user manual for a power tool or even a lawn mower often begins with a page which is dedicated to highlighting safety hazards and precautions before providing equipment related instructions.

Purpose Statement

- A purpose statement is a concise and focused statement that clearly defines the objectives and intentions of a document, such as a report, presentation, or proposal.
  - It articulates the specific purpose or goals that the document aims to achieve.
  - A purpose statement typically highlights the document's main audience, primary objectives, and sometimes secondary objectives.
- When planning your document, start with a concise statement that specifies the target audience and outlines both the primary and secondary purposes.

Source: www.canamgroup.com

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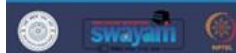
Our purpose statement should be written in a concise and focused manner.

 It should clearly define the objectives and intentions of a document, whether it is a report, a presentation or a project proposal or any other type of document. It should articulate the specific purpose and goals that the document aims to achieve. A purpose statement typically highlights the document's main audience, primary objectives and sometimes secondary objectives. When planning our document, we should start with a concise statement that specifies the target audience and outlines both the primary and the secondary purposes. The purpose statement should serve as a guiding principle to ensure that the content, structure and tone of the document align with the intended purpose and efficiently communicate the desired message to the readers or audience without any fuzziness.

By formulating such clear statements, we establish a solid foundation for the content and direction of the document. Apart from these, it is also necessary for us to consider how and why others would use the document. We should try to enquire whether the readers are more inclined towards acquiring factual knowledge or understanding the concepts or whether they will utilize the information for decision making purpose. In the context of technical communication, we often find that the context can be easily established for answering these type of questions. We should also consider whether immediate actions can be taken based on the provided information and whether the readers require a more detailed step-by-step instructions so that it can also be used after a certain time gap.

In addition to answering these questions, we should also consider directly asking members of our audience to validate their specific requirements in terms of information. This approach allows us to verify their preferences and ensures that our document effectively addresses their requirements. When writing for someone familiar to us, such as a co-worker, a colleague within the engineering departments, a professor in the same unit reviewing your lab reports or your thesis supervisor, you have to customize the report to suit their specific knowledge level, their interests and requirements. However, certain audiences are broader and less specific. For example, readers of a journal article, readers of user manuals, a set of first aid procedures would also be read by non-specific readers or an accident report which can be evaluated by experts of different fields.

When we have a limited understanding of the audience background, we must determine whether the document should be highly technical, moderately technical or even non-technical targeting a layperson. However, our approach should always be in favor of the audience that is least exposed.

Audience's Technical Background

- A technical audience refers to individuals who possess in-depth knowledge, expertise, and understanding of the subject matter.
  - Technical communication targeting this audience can involve in-depth technical documentation, research papers, engineering specifications, or advanced technical training materials.
  - Technical writing should utilize industry-specific language, acronyms, and terminology that are familiar to the target audience to demonstrate credibility and ensure clear communication among professionals in the field.

Source: https://youtu.be/f74_UrKQMwA?feature=shared

10

The technical background of the audience plays a significant role in determining the linguistic choices, the technical background we are providing, the content as well as the level of our documents. A technical audience refers to those individuals who possess an in-depth knowledge, expertise in the field and understanding of the subject matter, people who are acquainted with the latest trends. Technical communication targeting this audience can involve in-depth technical documentation, research papers, engineering specifications, advanced technical training materials and also technical abbreviations.

Technical writing should utilize industry specific language, acronyms and terminology that are likely to be familiar to the target audience. It shows our credibility and ensures a clear communication among professionals in the field. Examples of a technical audience include scientists, researchers, engineers or specialized professionals within a specific field. Technical communicators must understand the specific needs, expertise and expectations of their target audience in order to effectively communicate the technical information.

- A semi-technical audience consists of individuals who may be familiar with the subject matter but lack the same technical expertise as a specialized audience.
  - They may require more contextual explanations and simplified terminology to grasp the information effectively.
  - Instructional materials, user guides, or introductory technical content can be directed towards a semi-technical audience.
  - Communication for a semi-technical audience aims to balance technical accuracy and accessibility.

Source: www.coderpad.io.com

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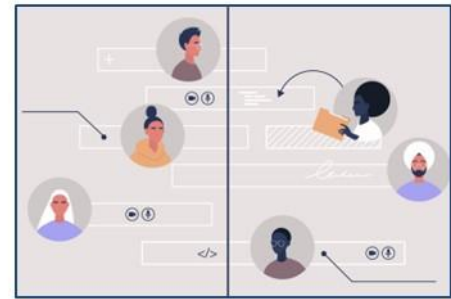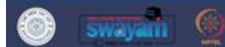
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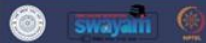
They may therefore require more contextual explanations and simplified terminology in order to grasp the information in an effective manner. Instruction materials, user guides or introductory technical content can be directed towards a semi-technical audience. Communication for a semi-technical audience aims to balance technical accuracy and accessibility in such a language so that even an educated person who may not be trained in the related field is able to understand and act upon the instructions which are given through our technical writing. While technical accuracy is important, we should also be careful of not burdening the semi-technical audience with excessive technical details. We should create opportunities for the semi-technical audience to ask questions or seek clarifications, particularly in the context of digital communication.

We should encourage their engagement and provide avenues for further learning or exploration for those who wish to dive deeper into the technical aspects through the interactive measures available to us in the digital formats.

A non-technical audience refers to individuals who have limited or no background knowledge in the subject matter. They may require information to be presented in a clear, accessible manner using non-technical language, easy day-to-day words and providing ample explanations and examples of which they can relate to. These audiences could include the general public, stakeholders or individuals from different professional backgrounds who are unfamiliar with the technical aspects of the topic or people who are not highly educated even. Examples include consumer product instructions, public awareness campaigns or general educational material.

Understanding the distinctions between these audience types allows technical communicators to tailor their content, language and approach to meet the needs and comprehension levels of the intended recipients. Adapting the communication style accordingly ensures that the information is effectively communicated and understood by the target audience regardless of their background. In certain cases, a single document may be aimed towards audiences of two different kinds and here are some strategies to facilitate smooth transitions in such cases.

- For shorter documents like letters, memos, or emails (less than two pages), consider rewriting the content at different levels to cater to different backgrounds.

- For longer documents exceeding two pages, prioritize addressing the needs of the primary readers likely to have the relevant technical knowledge.

- Additionally, provide supplementary materials such as *appendices, glossaries, hyperlinks,* or other accessible resources to assist secondary readers with different levels of expertise.

- Transmittal letters and informative abstracts can also aid non-experts in understanding highly technical reports.

Source: www.stellarlibrary.com
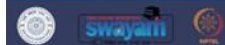
For shorter documents which run into less than two pages like letters, memos or emails etc., we can even consider the possibility of preparing different drafts, that is rewriting the content at different levels to cater to different backgrounds.

For longer documents exceeding two pages, we should prioritize addressing the needs of the primary readers likely to have the relevant technical knowledge. Additionally, we should provide supplementary materials such as appendices, glossaries, hyperlinks or other accessible resources to assess secondary readers with different levels of expertise. Transmitted letters and informative abstracts can also aid non-experts in understanding highly technical reports. We can also think of providing a more in-depth technical information for the technical audience while presenting a simplified high-level overview for the non-technical audience. This ensures that each group receives the appropriate level of information without overwhelming or underwhelming either audience.

Digital documents such as web pages, blogs, wikis, PDFs and shared drive documents offer a great solution for addressing diverse technical levels within an audience. These digital formats provide the flexibility to incorporate interactive features like hyperlinks, tabs and other interactive elements. They help to direct different audiences to content which is tailored to their interests and backgrounds. We can also think of incorporating multiple entry points into the digital document. This would help us in accommodating different levels of audience with different types of familiarity with the subject matter.

Unlike traditional printed materials, digital documents can be accessed by multiple users simultaneously regardless of their location. For example, a digital document could provide a high-level overview or an executive summary for newcomers or non-technical audience. While it may offer more detailed sections for experts or those seeking in-depth information.

- – A digital document has intuitive navigation and robust search functionality that allows users to quickly locate the information they seek, regardless of their background or expertise.
- – Feedback Mechanisms allow users to provide feedback or ask questions directly within the digital document allowing for continuous improvement and the opportunity to address specific user needs or concerns.
- – Geographical boundaries do not limit digital documents and are especially valuable when readers come from different countries or cultures.
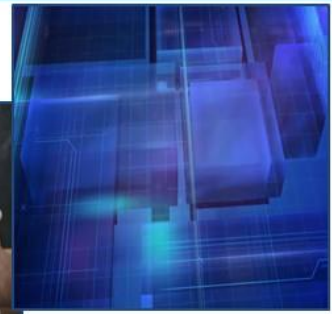
 A digital document has intuitive navigation and robust search functionality that allows users to quickly locate the information they seek regardless of their background or experience. We should also think of the feedback mechanism particularly when we are planning a digitally uploaded document.

  This allows users to provide feedback or to ask questions in an interactive manner directly within the digital document. It would also help us in continually improving on our documentation and provide an opportunity to address specific user needs or concerns without any delay. Geographical boundaries do not limit digital documents and therefore they are especially valuable when readers come from different countries or cultures. Web-based documents allow readers to choose their country, language or culture through links. It ensures that they receive properly translated and localized information that is adapted to their specific needs and preferences.

  We will examine technical communication and its scope in the later parts of this module. Now let us discuss how to anticipate the preferences of the audience and the strategies to measure it.

Anticipate Audience Preferences

- The length and level of detail in your document should be based on understanding your audience's requirements.
- Consider whether you were specifically requested to keep the document concise or provide comprehensive information.
- Determine whether the audience is primarily interested in the conclusions and recommendations, or if they prefer a more thorough explanation with everything spelled out.

Source: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LaWtMx-afFo
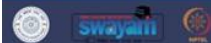
16

The length and level of detail in our document is to be based on our understanding of the audience requirements. We should consider whether we are specifically requested to keep the document concise or provide comprehensive information. We should also be aware of the in-house policies in terms of the length and level etc.

We should also determine whether the audience is primarily interested in the conclusions and recommendations or if they prefer a more thorough explanation with everything spelled out. This would have a direct bearing on the manner of our writing. We should recognize that people have different attention spans and it can vary based on the context as well as medium of communication. Some individuals may prefer shorter concise content that gets straight to the point while others may appreciate more in-depth comprehensive information. We should further consider the medium and channel through which the content is to be delivered.

Social media platforms often have character or time limitations. In contrast, long form articles or videos may be more suitable for dedicated websites or educational platforms.

- Consider the document format expected by your audience, such as a letter, memo, email, short report, or a longer formal report with supplements like a title page, table of contents, and appendixes.
- Determine if the use of visuals and well-designed page layouts, such as charts, graphs, drawings, headings, and lists, can improve the accessibility of the content.
- Decide whether the document should be provided as a PDF, a website with embedded links, a printed hard copy, a social media post, or a combination of these formats.

Multiple formats of content

Infographic | Video | Audio

Slides | Powerpoint

Source: www.scovelo.com

 We should also decide on the format of the document which is likely to be expected by our audience depending on the analysis of the situation within which we are preparing this document. It can be a letter, a memo, an email, a short report to be uploaded or a longer formal report with different subtitles and hyperlinks like a title page, table of contents, appendices etc. We should determine if the use of visuals and well-designed page layouts such as charts, graphs, drawings, headings and lists can improve the accessibility of the content.
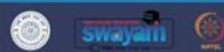
  We should decide whether the document should be provided as a PDF, a website with embedded links, a printed hard copy, a social media post or a combination of these formats. We should also ensure that the chosen format is adaptable and accessible to the target audience. We should consider factors such as language preferences, visual impairments or technological limitations that may impact the audience ability to access or engage with the communication. We should also be able to provide alternatives or accommodations when necessary to make the content accessible to a wider audience.

The tone of communication refers to the attitude, style or manner in which the message is conveyed and it plays a crucial part in shaping the overall perception and reception of the communication by the audience.

The tone should be aligned with the characteristics of the specific audience, their preferences and expectations. Workplace readers expect a tone that reflects the importance or urgency of the topic while considering the relationship between the writer and the reader. It is crucial to maintain professionalism and avoid using an unprofessional tone that is commonly seen in tweets, text messages and casual emails among friends outside of the workplace. The tone we choose may range from friendly and encouraging to rather distant and official depending on the context. By understanding the audience, reflecting on their values, maintaining professionalism and establishing empathy, adapting to the subject matter, tailoring to the communication channel and seeking feedback, we can develop an appropriate and effective tone that resonates with the specific audience we are addressing.

Working around Deadlines

- Workplace documents typically have deadlines, so it's essential to determine when they need to be submitted.
  - Consider creating a schedule with milestones to ensure timely completion.
  - Also, consider whether any of the information in your document might become outdated if you delay its completion.
  - When setting a deadline, it is crucial to consider the time needed for the audience to receive, process, and engage with the communication, especially if it requires their input or action.

Source: www. invotech.com

19

Workplace documents typically have deadlines, so it is essential to determine when they need to be submitted. We should consider creating a schedule with milestones to ensure timely completion and should also consider whether any of the information in the document might become outdated if we delay its completion. When setting a deadline, it is crucial to consider the time needed for the audience to receive, process and engage with the communication, especially if it requires their input or action. We should also consider the frequency of communication and the availability of the audience when setting deadlines. For one-time communications like announcements, the deadline may be fixed.

For ongoing communications like newsletters, we should set realistic deadlines to maintain regular and timely delivery. We should also take into account the availability of the audience, including holidays and weekends, etc., to ensure maximum engagement and participation.

Production Budget

- We should also evaluate if the document has a production budget. If so, determine the allocated amount.

  - Identify areas where you can save money, such as in obtaining permission to use external materials or in web design and page layout.

  - Assess the time and financial resources your company can allocate for creating the document, ensuring that you stay within budget and meet the requirements.

  - Allow flexibility in the production budget to accommodate unexpected expenses, adjustments, or contingencies that may arise during production.

Source: www.vecteezy.com
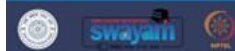
And ultimately, it boils down to the budget perhaps. We should also evaluate if the document has a prediction budget and if so, we have to determine the allocated amount.

We have to identify areas where we can save money, such as obtaining the permission to use external materials or in web design and page layout. We should also assess the time and financial resources your company or organization can allocate for creating the document and ensuring that you stay within budget and meet the requirements efficiently. We should also allow flexibility in the production budget to accommodate unexpected expenses, adjustments or contingencies that may arise during production. We should also evaluate the potential return on investment based on the target audience responsive behavior. A well-executed production that resonates with the audience can generate positive outcomes, such as increased brand recognition, customer loyalty or revenue or an acceptance at a higher level.

The production budget should align with the projected ROI, that is the return on investment and desired outcomes. Regularly reviewing and analyzing audience feedback and engagement metrics can help refine and optimize the length of the content to better suit the preferences of the specific audience.

Conclusion

- In the digital age, audiences are active participants in the content ecosystem, emphasizing the need to build a sense of community, promote dialogue, and be receptive to feedback.

- Audiences are not static; they evolve over time, requiring adaptability and ongoing refinement of communication strategies.

- Furthermore, the presence of fake audiences serves as a poignant reminder of the complex and ever-evolving landscape which underscores the critical importance of authenticity and integrity in our digital endeavors.

- Therefore, it's imperative that we remain adaptable, continuously updating and refining our communication strategies to accommodate the changing needs.

Source: en.wikipedia.org

In the digital age, audiences are active participants in the content ecosystem, emphasizing the need to build a sense of community, promote dialogue and be receptive to feedback. Audiences are not static, they evolve over time, requiring adaptability and ongoing refinement of communication strategies. Furthermore, the presence of fake audiences serves as a poignant reminder of the complex and ever-evolving landscape, which underscores the critical importance of authenticity and integrity in our digital endeavors.

Therefore, it is imperative that we remain adaptable, continuously updating and refining our communication strategies to accommodate the changing needs. In the upcoming module, we will explore strategies and effective methods to influence and engage with audiences, taking into account the active role of audiences in the digital age, their dynamic nature and the importance of community building. Thank you.