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Frozen Planet
Summative Evaluation
Executive Summary

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Frozen Planet is a seven-episode prime time television series, with a complementary interactive website, co-produced by the BBC and the Discovery Channel. Through high-definition “blue chip” visuals, the series aimed to increase awareness and understanding about the natural world. Producers intended for the project to inspire the audience both to learn and to enhance their appreciation of life at the polar regions and of the effects of seasonal change on our earth. With a grant from the National Science Foundation (Award number: 0848627), the Discovery Channel contracted with Goodman Research Group, Inc. (GRG), a Cambridge-based research firm specializing in the evaluation of educational programs, to conduct summative evaluation of the *Frozen Planet* project.

The goal of GRG’s summative evaluation was to assess the overall influence of the series and website on TV viewers and web visitors. In accord with the Discovery Channel team’s hope that *Frozen Planet* would “change hearts and minds” of its audience, GRG designed an evaluation to examine the effects of exposure to *Frozen Planet* on participants’ affect, cognition, and behavior. In particular, the evaluation posed the following research questions:

1. To what extent did *Frozen Planet* lead to increased appreciation for and enlightenment about life in the earth’s polar regions?
2. Did *Frozen Planet* give viewers a better fundamental understanding about the environment where the animals live?
3. What was the overall use of and response to the series and the website?

To address these questions, GRG conducted a national viewer study of 82 participants who completed online surveys before and after viewing at least three and up to all seven *Frozen Planet* episodes. GRG also developed and launched a survey of the *Frozen Planet* website. In all, 1,912 visitors to the *Frozen Planet* website over the broadcast period completed the online survey. All evaluation participants commented on their exposure to the various *Frozen Planet* resources (i.e., series, website features, social media sites), and described outcomes of use of the program overall.

KEY FINDINGS

Frozen Planet appealed to a wide audience including those with a range of knowledge and interests in science research and environmental issues. The audience was inspired to seek out more information, learn about ways to get involved, and to encourage others to do the same.

- *Frozen Planet* elicited an affective, or emotional, response from its viewers, reflective of “changing hearts.”

- Viewers expressed their impressions of the series, how they would characterize their experience, and how they would describe it to others. In all instances, they used words that spoke to their emotional response to the series and its “*visually stunning*” and “*inspiring*” portrayal of the natural world.
- *Frozen Planet* was received quite positively by all viewers (95% rated the series overall as *very good* or *excellent*). Moreover, those who watched all seven episodes reported even stronger enjoyment of the experience; average series ratings were 4.87 and 4.63 out of a possible 5.
- Viewers had difficulty selecting an episode they liked best or least; they reported enjoyment of the entire series. They identified particular scenes and stories that stood out to them. Particular stand-out scenes or stories were those that featured penguins interacting, building their nests and returning to their babies and partners after spending time at sea; the wolves hunting bison; and the caterpillar taking years to become a moth.
- Viewers expressed strong appreciation for learning how the seasons change and the animals adapt to their surroundings. They enjoyed the opportunity to see footage of areas of the earth to which they have not previously been exposed.
- *Frozen Planet* provided viewers with an increased fundamental understanding about the natural world, reflecting a cognitive response akin to “changing minds.”
- After viewing, participants reported significantly higher understanding of the natural world, how animals behave and adapt to life in the polar regions, and the differences between the Arctic and Antarctica. They also reported significantly higher familiarity with and understanding of terms and phenomena that were new to them. For example, before viewing, 76% had *never heard of* katabatic winds; after viewing, 65% *heard of it and know what it is*.
- The series effectively increased awareness of life at the earth’s polar regions, and understanding of how seasonal change at the poles affects the entire earth. Average ratings were 4.60 and 4.39 out of 5, respectively.
- Already strong interest in the earth’s polar regions, life at the poles, and animal rights and protection increased significantly after viewing.
- Viewers were motivated to watch more of the series and to learn more about conservation and environmental issues. After viewing and/or visiting the website, *Frozen Planet* users planned to seek additional information and discuss with others issues related to conservation, the environment, and the natural world.

- Both series viewers and website visitors were likely to recommend *Frozen Planet* to friends and family members, as well as to watch more and visit the website again themselves.

KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

- Use off-screen narration for future series where the visuals can speak for themselves. Viewers perceived a clear sense of understanding and call to action by learning about the life and experiences of animals at the polar regions.
- Develop cross-promotion of TV and online resources for future series about the natural world. The topics and issues raised were appealing to the audience and use of one resource (e.g., TV or website) piqued interest such that users were motivated to continue their exposure and learning by watching more episodes, visiting the website, and discussing the issues with friends and family.
- Include in the tease for upcoming episodes some form of cliff-hanger that will compel viewers to tune in the following week. Viewers were highly engaged in the animals' stories and wanted to see how each scenario ended. A tease for the next program might show part of a hunting scene, excluding the outcome of the chase.
- Consider the invitation to provide feedback on a series as a means of additional promotion for future series. While the website reached a broad range of visitors, some participants in the viewer study indicated they may not have known about or watched the series if not for their participation in the summative evaluation.
- The opportunity to provide feedback that may affect future production can be an effective way to increase and sustain viewership of future programs and series.

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