
The New Speed of Mobile Engagement

In a time when consumers are constantly connected through their mobile devices, optimizing content for mobile can't take a back seat. Readers expect a seamless experience, no matter how they're viewing content — across platforms, devices, and browsers. But with such fragmentation on the mobile device and distribution side, publishers have not had an easy path forward.

The Accelerated Mobile Pages (AMP) Project was launched in February 2016 to address this problem, and to counteract both the increasing bloat of web pages and the subsequent consequences of this diminished user experience for readers, publishers, and advertisers. By creating a platform from which media companies could publish clean, streamlined versions of their articles, AMP promised to speed up the average page load time and make it easier for visitors to stick around and read their content.

Since it launched, questions abound about AMP's effectiveness for publishers: Does improving page load time positively impact readership and revenue? How has publisher adoption of AMP, and related traffic, grown so far? Does it deliver on the promise of a quicker, cleaner mobile user experience? How does AMP compare to Facebook's Instant Articles format? And the question on everyone's mind — what is the impact on consumer engagement?

Chartbeat recently evaluated mobile audience behaviors and content interactions on AMP and Facebook Instant Articles across our global network of leading media sites. Some of our findings are more conclusive than we thought: in sum, speed matters more to the consumer than we anticipated, and leads to deeper engagement with content. However, it remains to be seen what the long-term benefits of high speed platforms are for publishers — and whether the effort and investment required outweigh the results.

The Landscape

It's no secret that Google provides a key opportunity for new readers to discover content and publishers to garner new traffic. In fact, according to Chartbeat's data, Google refers an impressive 40% of external traffic to publisher sites globally, and more than half of that traffic comes from a mobile device.¹ Given the significant percentage of mobile traffic routing to publisher websites, it is important to optimize each article for mobile reader engagement.

Enter: AMP. Created on the promise of a faster, cleaner mobile web that would be beneficial for consumers and publishers, the project was embraced by publishers quickly, yet cautiously. As of May 2017, there are 2 billion AMP pages produced by more than 900,000 domains, with roughly 35 million new AMP pages added to the total each week.²

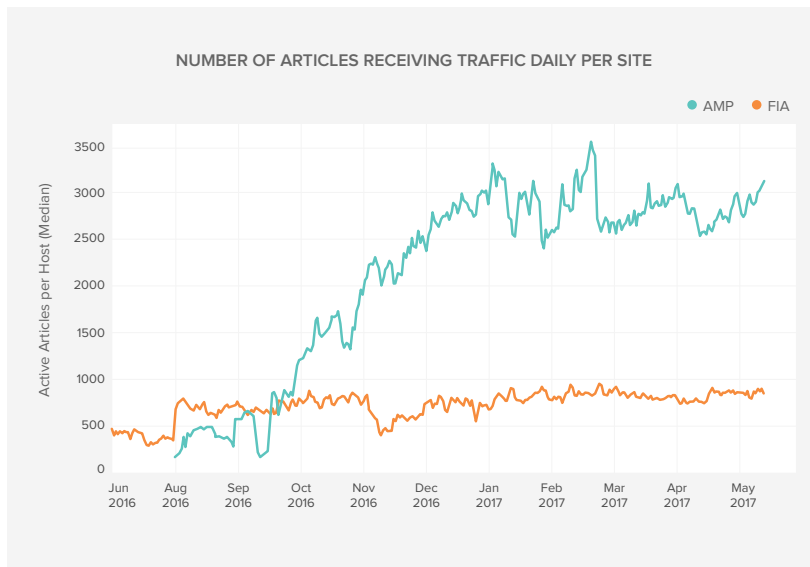
However, AMP is not the only platform aiming to create a better mobile web — Facebook launched its own version of streamlined articles on mobile with Facebook Instant Articles (FIA) in May 2015. As of August 2016, there were more than 1,000 publishers partnered with the project, publishing tens of thousands of Instant Articles every day.³

It's noteworthy that, according to our data, 97% of publishers who are testing FIA are also using AMP.

Quantifying the Impact

So how can we quantify the readership of AMP and FIA so far, and how does each platform compare?

To dive into consumption rates a little deeper, we looked at the number of articles per day that receive traffic on AMP or FIA for a typical site using Chartbeat's AMP/FIA implementation. As can be seen below, publishers using FIA are seeing just shy of 1,000 articles consumed through FIA daily. Sites with AMP however are seeing around 3,000 articles with traffic from AMP each day.



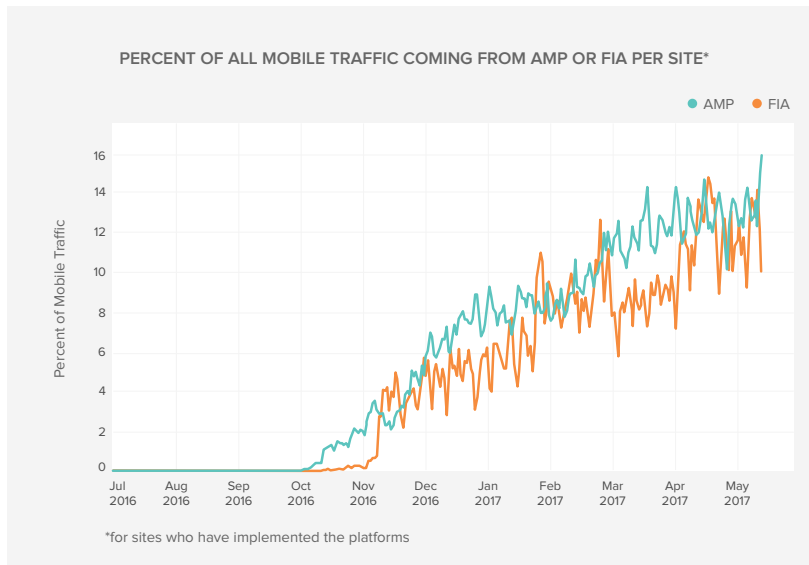
The number of AMP articles receiving traffic each day is 3x the number of active FIA pages.

Whereas we've seen a fairly consistent number of articles receiving traffic from FIA since June of 2016, publishers' active AMP content rose considerably between October 2016 and January 2017. This has leveled off, but despite publishers not necessarily publishing any more articles to AMP each day than to FIA, AMP is sustaining elevated levels. This leads us to conclude that content has a longer lifespan on AMP, or receives traffic for more days from AMP than from Facebook Instant Articles, resulting in the elevated levels of active AMP articles we see above.

This trend actually reflects what we know from larger audience trends on search engines versus social platforms: pages receive traffic from search engines for a longer period of time than from social platforms. This is especially the case for content that is continuously relevant or particularly searchable. For this reason, publishers can expect to see benefits from AMP adoption on not just timely articles, but also on longer standing content.

The Effect on Publisher Traffic

While usage rates and the subsequent number of articles consumed on each platform differs, it turns out that both AMP and FIA content have been receiving larger and larger shares of publishers' mobile traffic, and at fairly equal rates. As of mid-May 2017, a typical publisher who implemented AMP saw 16% of all mobile traffic on their AMP content. Comparatively, publishers with FIA saw 14.8% of all mobile traffic on FIA content.



Both AMP and FIA content are garnering larger and larger shares of publishers' mobile traffic, and at fairly equal rates.

Those percentages have been slowly rising since both platforms were released. Whether or not this growth will continue depends on the platforms themselves: how are these initiatives delivering on their promise to make a faster, better mobile web for consumers and an optimized distribution alternative for publishers? How have audiences reacted so far?

A Faster Web?

These days, it's all about speed. In fact, 47% of consumers expect a web page to load in 2 seconds or less and 40% of people abandon a website that takes more than 3 seconds to load, meaning they never reach the published content at all.⁴ So how are AMP and FIA optimizing page load times?

Chartbeat's analysis below shows that AMP loads roughly **four times** faster than the standard mobile site experience, and Instant Articles load even more quickly—in fact, **88%** of Instant Articles load too quickly for us to even register a load time. Now *that's* fast.

Median Page Load Time



AMP loads roughly 4x faster than the standard mobile site experience.

This is a big deal, and proves that both initiatives are delivering on their key promise: providing a much quicker load time to improve reader experience. And publishers are seeing the effects—with less time spent waiting for pages to load, consumers have more time freed up for engaging with content.

Better User Experience, More Engaged Readers

With so many distributed ways of finding content and such short consumer attention spans, every second counts. So how does AMP stack up?

Average Engaged Time



55% of visitors to a website will leave having spent less than 15 seconds engaged with the page.⁵

Time spent with AMP content is 35% longer than time spent with content on the standard mobile web when coming from search.

Chartbeat's data shows that readers engage with AMP content for 35% longer than standard mobile web content, spending an average of 48 seconds with AMP content vs. 36 seconds with mobile web content when coming from search. The fact that readers are engaging for so much longer than they normally would suggests that user experience really does matter in catching and holding attention. And according to our bench of case studies, longer engagement translates to many impactful results, such as higher viewability, increased loyalty and long-term audience growth.

The Future of High Speed Mobile

The number of overall sites who are publishing content using AMP is still growing, but the number of articles posted by those who have been testing the platforms for some time has leveled off. So the big question still remains: will publishers continue to scale their efforts and should these high speed platforms become the mobile industry norm?

While the increase in Engaged Time for publishers who have adopted both AMP and FIA are compelling, the jury is still out on whether the end justifies the means. The numbers here conclude that consumers clearly value these optimized mobile experiences and this may just be the evidence we need to validate their potential.

However, larger questions still remain around each on both publisher value and quality:

Publisher Value: Are these platforms really helping publishers grow audience and ad revenue as promised? What else must be done? And what does this do to the status quo?

Quality: How are “fake news” articles vetted before being boosted in each algorithm, and what does this mean for quality? For AMP, how does the minimal page design affect smaller publishers who can't afford to sacrifice branding on page or in the URL?

As publishers continue to use these platforms and readers continue to react, it'll be interesting to see how AMP and FIA evolve in the future—possibly in two completely different directions.

At the end of the day, visitors deserve a fast, clean, enjoyable reading experience where they spend most of their time—on mobile. And publishers can benefit from a more effective mobile environment where they can distribute and monetize content and scale their success. But at what cost? How can we make this win-win?

The good news is that despite the fine-tuning needed, the positive adoption and impact so far—which according to our data, concludes that there is a strong correlation between faster page load time and higher reader engagement on AMP—is encouraging for both consumers and publishers as we consider the future of mobile.

REFERENCES

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5. Chartbeat. [How to Build an Audience that Reads What You Write and Comes Back for More.](#)

Chartbeat is a participant in the AMP and FIA initiatives, and we're committed to helping media companies understand audience behaviors on site and off site, and around the mobile experience. Customers of Chartbeat can implement these platform integrations through the Chartbeat dashboard and watch their real-time results.

Visit our support site to learn how to set up the integrations, and for more mobile insights, reach out to us at insights@chartbeat.com.





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