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TIMOTHY JOYCE - MARKETING NEWS - MAY 13, 1983

SECTION 1.

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Par. 4: "I believe our competitor's through-the-book method understates magazine audiences, while recent reading obtains more accurate readership counts".
Comment: In fact Simmons through-the-book could overstate magazine audience because of their showing of separate colored card for each mast-head one by one, which must cause over-claiming of reading in the last six months. This may, or may not, be offset by skeletonizing, referred to in the next paragraph.

Par. 5-14: "Through-the-book (described in Par.5) using untouched full magazines, establishes the audience of a specific magazine (P. 13). However, skeletonized issues, as used by Simmons (Pars. 8 & 9) lead to understatement .. capturing only about 60% of total reading found by full through-the-book".
Comment: To say Simmons loses 40% of readers is ridiculous. Comparison with Audits & Survey's 1975 figures from full through-the-book shows no difference for in-home reading. For out-of-home reading Simmons is 40% less than Audits & Surveys, giving a net difference of 15%, which can't be ascribed to skeletonising.

Par. 14: "The level of reading advertisements is relatively constant between in-home and out-of-home reading".
Comment: What does "level of reading" mean? The "number of times looked at" by the one person for a weekly is probably only once out-of-home, compared with probably about twice in-home. For a monthly the figure is also probably only once out-of-home, but probably several times in-home. Has this been studied and reported in recent years?

Par. 15: "If monthlies take longer than weeklies to accumulate their audiences, and if forgetting is a function of time, it is obvious that (the readership of) monthlies is understated by through-the-book".
Comment: That is obviously true, but the understatement is likely to be very small compared with the vast over-statement from recent-reading, caused by prestige,

telescoping and replication, which is not offset by parallel reading.

Par. 17-19: Here it is explained that in recent-reading people are simply asked whether they had read any issue of each weekly in the last 7 days, and of each monthly in the last 30 days. It is also explained that the arithmetic of this method is, for example, that assuming the June issue of a monthly is read by 4% of adults in the month of issue (June) by 3% in the next month (July) by 2% in the 3rd month (August) and by 1% in the 4th month, then each issue has an audience of 10% built up over 4 months. Looking at those figures another way, in June 4% read that issue, 3% read the May issue, 2% the April issue and 1% the March issue. Therefore, asking whether any issue of a particular monthly magazine has been read in the last month gives a fairly accurate estimate of average-issue readership.

Comment: Of course it should, if exaggerations from prestige, telescoping (elastic memories) and replication can be reduced to insignificance. But every readership survey (except the Morgan Readership Survey) maximises prestige by showing separate mastheads one by one, instead of showing several at a time, either as a list or as reduced block-and-write covers. Moreover, other surveys don't try to minimise telescoping, as the Morgan Readership Survey does by first asking about the reading of dailies yesterday, and then day by day backwards for a week. That "teaches" people that a week ago began 7 days ago, not about a fortnight ago, as in many peoples' minds.

Replication (i.e. the repeated reading of back copies) seems to affect monthlies more than weeklies, which quickly "chase each preceding issue out of the house", as pass-alongs or as waste paper.

Par. 21: In this par. Timothy Joyce wickedly uses the above assumption of 4, 3, 2, 1 as if it were a fact. He applies it to all monthlies, and then claims that a through-the-book survey

of a monthly, using an issue 2 months old, would miss 30% of its readers!
Comment: In fact, through-the-book surveys of monthlies are conducted on issues 10 to 12 weeks old, not 8 weeks old. Moreover, most copies of monthlies gather most of their readers in the month of issue (after which they are shelved or destroyed) while other copies gather readers month by month, at varying rates depending on their pattern of pass-alongs, etc.

Par. 21 (1): Here it is claimed that replication and parallel reading have little effect and tend to offset each other, except that in recent-reading parallel reading may slightly underestimate audiences for monthlies.
Comment: We have not seen any recent figures to support those claims. Our comparisons of through-the-book and recent-reading indicate that with weekly magazines, replication and parallel reading have little effect. However, something (probably a mixture of telescoping and replication) produces too-high figures for monthlies from recent-reading, compared with true through-the-book. That is why we tried using reduced black-and-white front covers (in sets of three), and found they produced readership figures close to those from true through-the-book. We have never used skeletonised magazines.

Par. 21 (2): Here it is claimed that "telescoping" (i.e. saying a reading event happened more recently than it did) can be reduced to an acceptable minimum (does he mean maximum?) by proper questionnaire design.
Comment: There is no evidence that he has succeeded. However, asking first about daily papers, and going back day by day for a week, before asking about weeklies, we seem to have reduced telescoping for weeklies to insignificance. However, we have not succeeded (with the recency question) with monthlies so (as stated above) we use reduced black-and-white covers of 10 to 12 week old specific issues.

Par. 22: This says the recent-reading method can potentially solve its problems.
Comment: Yet the previous 21 paragraphs claim all problems have been solved! We believe we have found a reliable way of using recent-reading for weeklies - by showing lists of titles in several sequences, instead of showing mast-heads one by one. This reduces to insignificance the effects of prestige i.e. wrongly claiming to be a reader. It seems that no other readership survey has considered prestige as an exaggerator. Unfortunately that does not "work" for monthlies, because telescoping and replication inflates claimed readership. However (as mentioned above) by using reduced black-and-white front covers of specific issues, we obtain figures for monthlies close to those from true through-the-book.

Frequency: In this article Timothy Joyce does not mention that he asks frequency of reading and that he uses it to calculate reach. We don't ask frequency of reading, because it is exaggerated by prestige, telescoping and replication. Instead, we double-interview some cross-sections after 4 weeks, to measure the number of casual readers i.e. those who were in the first survey but not the second. Simmons also uses double-interviews to measure casualness, which he calls turnover. Note that casualness is the reciprocal of regularity. If two magazines have similar numbers of readers, the one with the larger number of casual readers will reach the greatest number of people in a given period.

'Skeletonized' test issues miss out-of-home readers

Recent-reading method yields more accurate counts of magazine audiences

BY TIMOTHY JOYCE
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LAST SEPTEMBER, we announced the results of our annual magazine readership survey, which indicated that America's two leading newsweeklies had a combined readership of about 46 million adults.

Another firm, our major competitor in this field, counted some 37 million total readers. These widely varying numbers—along with disparate readership tallies for other magazines—are caused by using two different research methodologies to count the house.

Because advertisers and their agencies rely on such data to allocate their magazine ad dollars (more than \$3.4 billion last year), they increasingly demand answers regarding these divergent readership counts.

I believe that our competitor's "through-the-book" research method consistently understates magazine audiences while our "recent-reading" technique (developed in Great Britain), which uses less complicated and more timely interviewing methods, obtains more accurate readership counts.

In the through-the-book technique, an actual issue of the magazine is shown to and studied by the respondent, who is then asked if he read or looked at it some time before the interview. Obviously, the test issue has to be suitably "aged" so that it can be assumed that it has, in fact, picked up almost all its eventual readers by the time of the interview.

The original through-the-book method used untouched, full magazine issues. Later, the test issues were "skeletonized," consisting of only the front cover and a limited number of editorial elements from the full issue.

FROM 1950 ON, the Alfred Politz firm adopted and refined the technique for *Life* magazine and other publications. Politz insisted that 12 was the maximum number of titles which could be measured by the technique.

Over the years, the measurement of only a dozen magazine titles proved inadequate, so the number was increased. As more titles had to be shown to respondents, the use of skeletonized issues was introduced. Such issues exclude regular features and present only the opening pages of a limited number of sections.

During the 1950s, our major competitor, using this technique, became the dominant force in the syndicated magazine research field. By the late 1970s, the firm had refined the art of using skeletonized issues to the point where it was measuring about 75 titles, each including 12 items. Today, our competitors measure 110 titles, with skeletonized issues consisting of only nine editorial elements.

In the through-the-book interview, the respondent is handed a deck of cards on which are printed four-color reproductions of the logos of 110 magazines. The respondent is asked to sort the cards into two piles; those which he might have read or looked at in the last six months and those which he is sure he has not read.

The ones placed in the first pile are considered to be "screened-in" magazines. For each of these, a test issue is taken out of the interviewer's kit and the respondent is asked whether any of the nine editorial elements look interesting. Then the interviewer asks whether the respondent has read or looked at the issue before.

As new issues of each magazine come out they are sent to the field so the interviewer's kits of test issues are kept current. Six weeks or so after the first interview with a respondent, a second interview is attempted. If it cannot be completed, the data are ascribed. Audience estimates are averages of the two interviews.

THE FULL through-the-book methodology has a number of merits. It establishes the audiences of specific magazine issues directly. It uses a recognition procedure which should, ideally, minimize confusion between different magazines and issues. However, the skeletonizing of the test issues produces negative results.

Overall, skeletonized-issue measurement leads to the understatement of out-of-home reading (magazines read in the doctor's waiting room or barbershop, for example), capturing only about 60% of the total reading which is found by full through-the-book.

Admittedly, out-of-home readers spend much less time reading than in-home readers. However, a recent study by *People* magazine shows that the level of reading advertisements is relatively constant between in-home and out-of-home readers. The problem arises when many items (feature articles, for example) are removed from a skeletonized test issue and the respondent may be shown only articles that he has not read.

Another problem with through-the-book measurement is issue age. Assuming that monthly magazines take longer than weeklies to accumulate their actual issue audiences, and assuming that forgetting is a function of time, it is obvious that monthly magazines are understated by the through-the-book methodology.

The test issues shown are not old enough to pick up the late readers, but are too old to serve as satisfactory memory aids for the older readers.

The principle of the recent-reading method is that respondents are asked whether they have read any issue of each publication in its most recent publication interval; that is, the last seven days for a weekly and the last 30 days for a monthly. This yields an estimate of the audience of the average issue, even though the method is



Timothy Joyce

not "issue-specific." It is a much simpler technique to apply than through-the-book.

SUPPOSE THAT EACH issue of a monthly magazine is actually read by 10% of U.S. adults (about 16 million). Suppose too that each issue is read by 4% of adults in the month after it is published, 3% in the second month, 2% in the third, and 1% in the fourth.

Each issue has a total audience of 10% of the adult population, built up over four months. Equally, 10% of the population reads any issue in each month. For example, in June 4% read the June issue, 3% read the May issue, 2% read the April issue, and 1% read the March issue. Asking whether any issue has been read in the last month will therefore yield an estimate of the average-issue audience.

In recent reading, respondents are asked to remember only the reading events of the last month. In contrast, through-the-book respondents may have to recall events which may have occurred up to three months before the interview.

Further, this principle serves to underline one of the flaws in the through-the-book method: its inability to pick up late reading. If a test issue is three months old, using the previous example, 1% of the population (10% of all readers) will be missed; if it is only two months old, 3% of the population (30% of all readers) will be missed.

The three main questions asked about recent reading are:

1. Do replicated and/or parallel reading affect estimated audience levels? The evidence is that both these two effects are small and tend to cancel each other out. However, in the case of parallel reading, the recent-reading method may slightly understate audiences for monthlies.

2. Are there significant errors due to misstatement of the data of the last reading event, especially due to "telescoping?" The evidence is that these errors can be reduced to an acceptable minimum by proper questionnaire

design, so that overstatement or understatement are not significant.

3. Are magazine titles identified as accurately as they are with an issue-specified method? The evidence is that with proper questionnaire design, confusion is no greater and may even be less.

THEREFORE, the recent-reading methodology offers an alternative to through-the-book and can potentially solve the problems associated with it. For example, the recent-reading technique uses a logo card-sorting approach to eliminate unwanted "interviewer effects."

The audience levels found by recent-reading are considerably higher than those found by through-the-book. Comparisons show, however, that the differences are largely accounted for by the two deficiencies in skeletonized-issue measurement: the loss of a substantial proportion of out-of-home readers (who would be picked up by full through-the-book measurement) and a further loss of the readers of monthlies, due to the issue-age problem which all issue-specific measurements suffer from.

In recent-reading, relatively high levels of readers-per-copy are accounted for by high rates of home-to-home passalong and/or by substantial levels of out-of-home reading. The availability and appeal of copies in public places is a particularly important determinant of readers-per-copy.

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