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COMPARING READERSHIP TECHNIQUES IN A SINGLE SOURCE DATA BASE

SUMMARY

A study conducted in Canada in 1984 enabled us to examine two major factors in readership research on the basis of a single source data base.

By making a direct comparison on a respondent level of readership claims resulting from a recognition technique (modified TTB) and a recall technique (RR), we discovered that only a relatively small percentage of respondents were readers common to both methods. As a result, not only did readership levels differ but also reader profiles. This affected both AIR and multi-magazine reach/frequency analyses.

Furthermore, an examination of the effect of a screening or time-related filter question indicated that in this case the process eliminated legitimate readers by either measurement technique.

Traditional wisdom holds that Recent Reading techniques produce generally higher readership levels than the Through-the-Book method for the same magazines. In part this theory was challenged at the New Orleans conference in 1981 by Tennstädt and Hansen when they reported that research conducted by Allensbach indicated quite the opposite result. They also stated "... the assumption that different methods measure coverages at different levels but with identical ratios is absolutely false." They further indicated that there was, in their view, a weakness in the North American approach to TTB methods in the use of a filter question. This paper examines these statements and others in a single source study.

The data reported here is based on a survey conducted in larger markets in Canada in 1984. It was face-to-face and in the home and based on a stratified cluster sample designed to maximise the probability of finding

readers of a specific magazine. These data were therefore not readily projectable to full population, but the relationships between the tested titles were found to be generally consistent with known levels from Canada's national readership survey, PMB.

The questionnaire was structured in such a way that each selected respondent was asked each question in the readership section regardless of response. Therefore, a filter question based on having 'read or looked into any issue in the past six months' was posed, but the answers were merely recorded and not actually used to screen respondents for the readership questions which followed. Two separate methodologies were used. The first was a recency question using masthead cards. All respondents were then asked a highly modified Through-the-Book question using a cover, table of contents and opening page or spread from the lead or cover article. These were placed in plastic sleeves on a ring to allow for rotation of titles within three editorial-type groupings (news-weeklies, general interest monthlies, and business oriented monthlies). Finally a frequency question was asked of those who responded positively to the TTB question.

The questionnaire was pre-tested and the final version used to generate 600 completed interviews.

This paper reports on two aspects of the findings of this study:

- (1) the effect of the filter on readership levels in both methods
- (2) the different results generated by the two readership techniques when applied to the same set of respondents.

FILTER EFFECT

Since each respondent was asked all

**COMPARING READERSHIP TECHNIQUES IN A SINGLE
SOURCE DATA BASE**

questions, a simple tabulating process enabled us to establish readership levels as reported by screened and unscreened procedures in both TTB and Recency methods. Table 1 shows the percentage readership generated by each.

Through-the-Book was the more affected by the filter. There was a consistently higher level of readership when the filter was ignored than when the traditional filter procedure was applied. It appears that the filter does not only screen out non-readers, but a significant number of readers as well, ranging from about 5% to 33% of the screened readership that might have been reported in a PMB survey. The average across all titles was 11.5%. When these 'did-not-screen' readers were compared with screening levels, the relationship became more consistent, ranging from 2 to 7.5% of those who passed the filter, with an average of 5.0% for all magazines (Table 2).

Even in Recency, where one might have expected very little effect of an aided recall filter on a shorter recall readership question, there was a marked

screening out of claimed readers. The average in this instance was a healthy 7.4% of reported screened RR levels, although the range of these 'missed' readers when compared with either reported readership or screening levels is greater than in TTB.

The frequency of reading, asked of all TTB readers, screened or unscreened, suggests that most 'did-not-screen' readers were in fact occasional readers of the publication. Table 3 shows the index of response of unscreened readers versus screened readers at each possible level of frequency, clearly indicating that many who, after failing to pass the filter subsequently claimed Average Issue Readership, were in fact light readers of the publication.

A further calculation indicates that on average 75.5% of those 'did-not-screen' readers claimed a frequency level of one in four issues or less. Whereas these light readers might have reduced impact on multiple issue reach calculations, they carry the same weight in AIR considerations as any other reader.

TABLE 1
Readership by methodology percentage

	<i>% screened</i>	<i>Screened TTB</i>	<i>RR</i>	<i>Index TTB=100</i>	<i>Unscreened TTB</i>	<i>RR</i>	<i>Index TTB=100</i>
Maclean's	59.3	32.0	24.2	76	35.3	27.2	77
Newsweek	46.5	14.7	13.8	94	17.0	14.7	86
Time	63.8	34.8	29.3	84	38.8	30.2	78
FP Magazine	22.5	8.5	12.8	151	9.7	13.8	143
Goodlife	10.3	3.3	5.5	165	4.0	5.7	142
Saturday Night	18.2	6.3	6.3	100	7.7	7.3	96
Toronto Life	25.0	10.2	13.3	131	10.7	14.2	133
Quest	57.7	28.3	37.3	132	29.7	39.2	132
Cdn Business	20.8	4.7	11.2	239	6.0	13.0	217
En Route	23.0	3.8	8.3	217	4.3	8.5	196
Executive	7.8	1.5	2.3	156	2.0	3.0	150

COMPARING READERSHIP TECHNIQUES IN A SINGLE
SOURCE DATA BASE

TABLE 2
'Did-not-screen' readers as a
percentage of ...

	Readership*		Screening	
	TTB	RR	TTB	RR
Maclean's	10.4	12.4	5.6	5.1
Newsweek	15.9	6.0	5.0	1.8
Time	11.5	2.8	6.3	1.3
FP Magazine	13.7	7.8	5.2	4.4
Goodlife	20.0	3.0	6.5	1.6
Saturday Night	21.1	15.8	7.3	5.5
Toronto Life	4.9	6.3	2.0	3.3
Quest	4.7	4.9	2.3	3.2
Cdn Business	28.6	16.4	6.4	8.8
En Route	13.0	2.0	2.2	0.7
Executive	33.3	28.6	6.4	8.5

TABLE 4
Readers common to both techniques as a
percent of each

	Readership		Common as	
	TTB	RR	%TTB	%RR
Maclean's	32.0	25.8	60.4	74.8
Newsweek	14.7	13.8	54.5	57.8
Time	34.8	29.3	61.7	73.3
FP Magazine	8.5	12.8	82.4	54.5
Goodlife	3.3	5.5	70.0	42.4
Quest	28.3	37.3	73.5	55.8
Saturday Night	6.3	6.3	60.5	60.5
Toronto Life	10.2	13.3	72.1	55.0
Cdn Business	4.7	11.2	67.9	28.4
En Route	3.8	8.3	56.5	26.0
Executive	1.5	2.3	77.8	50.0
All magazines	13.5	15.1	67.0	52.6

* Readership calculated as screened TTB

TABLE 3
Frequency of reading unscreened versus screened TTB

	Index					See Note 1	Average % issues read screen unscreen	
	All	Most	Some	Few	Occas			
Maclean's	101	104	111	111	133	75.0	68.6	64.5
Newsweek	100	105	105	109	150	85.7	51.7	47.4
Time	101	105	108	115	150	75.0	65.7	61.7
FP Magazine	100	107	140	200	140	57.1	76.2	71.3
Quest	101	100	100	122	127	87.5	78.2	75.8
Saturday Night	100	133	108	300	140	75.0	57.2	52.2
Toronto Life	100	100	100	133	120	100.0	67.2	64.8
All magazines	101	105	109	120	140	75.5	67.3	63.1

Note 1 Column represents the percentage of 'did-not-screen' readers who had claimed frequency of one out of four issues (a few) or less

Note 2 Frequency of screened readers = Index 100

Note 3 Not all surveyed magazines shown here due to small cell sizes in some instances

Since it is not in the interest of any user of the data to have more than one-in-ten legitimate readers excluded from the reported levels, the reasons for this phenomenon should be closely examined. It would not be reasonable to drop the filter from most surveys, since the burden of asking a readership question, particularly in TTB, of all respondents would no doubt have other detrimental effects on the results. Changing the acceptable period in a time-related filter such as was used here from six months to a longer time such as a year, or using more detailed aids to prompt the respondent in the filter stage, might provide a better balance between the requirements of field work and good data.

READERSHIP LEVELS

A number of studies, including perhaps most importantly the ARF Comparability Study, have dealt with the numeric differences between the two most commonly used readership measurement techniques. The manner and degree of these differences have not been as fully investigated. (When comparing the two methods in this section of the paper, we will refer to screened readership levels.) The fact that a single respondent set answered to both methods allows us to compare the results of the two more directly.

Table 1, referred to earlier, shows the numeric differences in the readership levels attained in each technique. The only possibly surprising factor here is that, for weeklies, Through-the-Book produced higher absolute levels than Recency. For the monthlies the relationship was the reverse - as might have been expected. This is not altogether at odds with earlier reported work which indicated relatively lower levels for weeklies when compared with monthlies than did TTB methods. Whether this is due to greater replicated reading among monthlies or as a result of inaccuracy in the longer recall period (telescoping) is not within the scope of this paper. This survey did find

quite different levels of AIR from each measurement.

A more significant analysis is one that actually compares the two on a respondent basis - in other words, was a TTB reader also an RR reader, or vice versa. Table 4 lists the percentage of each calculated readership level that also qualified in the other methodology, that is the 'confirmed reader'. It is clear that these confirmed readers make up only a part of the reported readership levels and, therefore, not only did the numbers differ, but the individuals making up those numbers. In fact in the smaller numbers generated by TTB, common or confirmed readers represent 67% on average, and only about half when considering Recency levels.

However, even this finding would be merely of passing interest if the characteristics of the 'single-method reader', that is a reader who is measured under one technique but not the other, were similar for both methods. This is not the case.

Table 5 lists some basic demographics for one representative magazine from each group, comparing the two methods under consideration. These demographics were selected in view of the fact that each magazine tends to some degree to direct its editorial to an upscale market, and therefore sells advertising space on its ability to deliver these characteristics.

Although only two of these numbers passed a significance test at the 90% level, advertising agencies do not generally apply such tests when making buying decisions.

There are considerable differences in the reported composition of audience by methodology. When considered in combination (age + household income for instance), which is usually the case in magazine selection for an advertising campaign, these differences are exacerbated. Even *Saturday Night*, which reported identical absolute

TABLE 5
Demographics by readership technique percent composition

	<i>Maclean's</i>		<i>Saturday Night</i>		<i>Cdn Business</i>	
	<i>TTB</i> %	<i>RR</i> %	<i>TTB</i> %	<i>RR</i> %	<i>TTB</i> %	<i>RR</i> %
Age 25-49	57.8	54.8	57.9	55.3	60.7	68.7
Some post secondary education	76.0	67.1	84.2	92.1	82.1	83.6
Employed full-time	55.7	52.9	60.5	44.7	71.4	79.1
Household income \$35,000+	51.0	45.2	47.4	52.6	75.0	61.2

Note: Both techniques based on screened readers

levels of readership in each of the two methods, finds that the audience make-up would probably favour their selecting a Recency technique. Similarly, *Maclean's* would likely lobby for Through-the-Book, while *Canadian Business* might have a difficult time deciding based on the demographics.

As a third step, we investigated the effect of methodology on a simple multi-magazine reach and frequency problem. Table 6 takes what would not be an uncommon combination of one insertion in each of *Maclean's*, *Quest* and *Time*.

As this table shows, with this particular combination of three magazines, the absolute levels of net reach and average frequency are very similar for both methods. However, once this analysis is broken into its component parts, that is the combinations of each of the participating publications in pairs, the effect is quite startling - at least in net reach. In two instances the reach is greater in Recency, while in the third TTB produces a higher coverage. Unfortunately, we were unable to determine the effect of multiple insertions over a longer schedule is these same magazines, since not all the required frequency data were available, but it might be speculated that the differences would have been at least as great.

This study, albeit on a relatively small sample base, has indicated that there is a difference between readership as measured by a recall method when compared with a recognition method not only in absolute numbers, but more significantly in the characteristics of the individual readers. Demographic as well as reach/frequency analyses show that these differences are not consistent by circulation size or editorial type, and that they can greatly affect the decision-making process when magazine titles are being selected for an advertising campaign.

TABLE 6
Multi-magazine schedule
Reach and frequency analysis

	<i>TTB</i>		<i>Recency</i>	
	<i>Reach</i> %	<i>Avg</i> <i>freq</i>	<i>Reach</i> %	<i>Avg</i> <i>freq</i>
<i>Maclean's/</i> <i>Quest/Time</i>	61.3	1.6	60.3	1.5
<i>Maclean's/</i> <i>Quest</i>	31.3	1.5	37.2	1.5
<i>Maclean's/</i> <i>Time</i>	37.8	1.5	29.2	1.6
<i>Quest/Time</i>	34.2	1.5	40.7	1.5

It is not intended to enter a discussion on validity here, but if a reader is indeed a reader, the differences reported here should have been smaller, and the buying side of

the media industry could have a greater degree of confidence that the data presented to them by the syndicated services have a high degree of accuracy.