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THE EFFECTS ON QUALITATIVE DATA ON ISSUE SPECIFIC RESEARCH

HYPOTHESIS

There is a relationship between the issue used in study and such qualitative factors of readership measurement as time spent reading and ratings of editorial interest and number of occasions looked into.

INTRODUCTION

The Canadian studies from PMB (Print Measurement Bureau) have been used as a data source in an attempt to establish if a relationship exists between the actual issue as used in fieldwork and the qualitative data thus gathered. As the PMB technique is that of a skeletonised Through-the-Book methodology, the remarks may be limited as applying only to that technique. It is beyond the scope of this paper to explore the ramifications for other methodologies.

Data used in this analysis were collected in a personal interview using the questioning technique illustrated in Table 1.

METHODOLOGY

Data are sourced from personal interviews conducted by Canadian Facts on behalf of the Print Measurement Bureau during the period April to December 1984.

All information has been categorised on an *issue-specific* basis. That is, only interviews where, for example, the April issue was used have been allocated to Month I data regardless of the actual date of interview. Interviews were based on six issues for each publication and have been grouped by month - though issues were not necessarily consistent, due to publishing dates and the discretion of the individual publisher as to age of issue at time of study. For the sake of clarity, issues are labelled I to VI.

TABLE 1

Now, I would like to ask you a few more questions about the specific magazine issues that you say you read or looked into.

(a) (*Show magazine*) On how many separate occasions can you remember looking into it - disregarding this interview of course?

(b) (*Hand grey card D*) Thinking about all the occasions and places where you might have read this issue, tell me where you happened to look into it. *Probe:* Where else?

(c) About how much time in total did you spend reading or looking into this particular issue? Please be as accurate as you can.

(d) How interesting do you find this magazine in general? Please give it a score between one and ten for interest - one would be the lowest score and ten would be the highest.

(For the purposes of the analysis, with its focus on qualitative questions, only the results of 4a, 4c and 4d have been scrutinised.)

Total sample size for the year 1984 was 6,192 persons 12+. For the interest of readers, exhibits included here show qualitative data scores for women 18+ as well and the total sample size for that group is approximately 3,115. Based on coverage figures for the four publications studied, one may assume then that individual sample size by month ranges from a low of 68 to a high of 188. As all respondents must answer all qualitative questions, this was deemed sufficient for the analysis presented here.

As mentioned above, four publications are included. They have been labelled Publication A, B and C and D. For the interested reader, Publications A, B and C are what may be termed women's magazines and Publication D is a general interest magazine. They are monthly publications.

All individual scores are presented in indexed form only to comply with restrictions put on the data by the Print Measurement Bureau. However, where pertinent, ranges of actual data are given to assist the reader in measuring the magnitude of difference.

RESULTS

Results are presented in Tables 2 and 3, indexed only, with the average in each case representing 100 based on the *weighted* response by month.

OBSERVATIONS

Note: In the case of each factor, data have been analysed for three variables: Month-to-month, publication-to-publication and base- (or target group) to-base.

(1) Interest scores are the qualitative element least inclined to volatility from *month-to-month*. This may be a product of the relatively narrow range from which a score can be chosen (respondents being asked to rate a publication on a score of one to 10). It could, however, indicate a very close adherence to the actual wording of the question on the part of both interviewer and respondent; this is the only question of the three qualitative queries which refers to the magazine 'in general' as opposed to focussing on 'this particular issue'.

TABLE 2

	I	II	All person 12+ Months I-VI			
			III	IV	V	VI
<i>Magazine A</i>						
Interest scores*	97	99	102	100	107	106
Time spent reading**	98	105	135	91	90	113
Number of occasions***	98	103	103	99	109	108
<i>Magazine B</i>						
Interest scores	98	95	101	99	106	103
Time spent reading	92	94	97	107	100	106
Number of occasions	106	97	92	106	104	94
<i>Magazine C</i>						
Interest scores	102	103	95	106	99	98
Time spent reading	89	133	95	117	82	118
Number of occasions	98	103	79	111	108	117
<i>Magazine D</i>						
Interest scores	102	101	98	98	101	103
Time spent reading	101	111	102	102	96	107
Number of occasions	111	112	85	97	92	118

* Responses to question "How interesting do you find this magazine in general?"

** Responses to question "About how much time in total did you spend reading or looking into this particular issue?"

*** Responses to question "On how many separate occasions can you remember looking into it?"

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(2) Interest scores are the element least likely to vary in range away from the average *by publication*. This is probably attributable to the limited response selection or wording of the question as outlined previously.

(3) There is almost no variance noted in interest scores *by base* on a month-to-month basis.

(4) The indexed 'time spent reading' is far more inclined to reveal extremes from *month-to-month*. This question is clearly intended to be issue-specific and, it must be remembered, is answered by the respondent when he/she is looking at a copy of the publication. The most noteworthy example occurs with Magazine C among women 18+ with a range in index of 80 to 141 representing a real range in TSR of 85 minutes to 152 minutes. The actual number of pages in

the copies under review differed by only eight pages (232 versus 240).

(5) Predictably, this TSR element is also the one which varies most from *publication-to-publication* but all are susceptible to some variance.

(6) Time spent reading factors, unlike interest scores, show variability from *one base to another*. The range noted for the most stable (on an index basis), Magazine D, is more dramatic among women 18+ than among all persons 12+.

(7) The number of occasions on which a public is 'looked into' also varies greatly from *month-to-month*. Ranges noted here are from a low of 11 points on an indexed scale (for Magazine A - all persons 12+) to a high of 47 points (for Magazine D - women 18+).

TABLE 3

	Women 18+ Months I-VI					
	I	II	III	IV	V	VI
<i>Magazine A</i>						
Interest scores*	100	99	98	106	103	109
Time spent reading**	96	103	142	100	89	123
Number of occasions***	99	98	111	105	106	111
<i>Magazine B</i>						
Interest scores	96	99	95	104	106	110
Time spent reading	98	91	94	104	99	129
Number of occasions	105	101	86	111	103	99
<i>Magazine C</i>						
Interest scores	100	102	99	100	98	105
Time spent reading	87	127	109	105	80	141
Number of occasions	93	99	87	99	111	130
<i>Magazine D</i>						
Interest scores	105	100	101	99	101	108
Time spent reading	108	107	93	105	89	113
Number of occasions	118	124	76	94	92	123

* Responses to question "How interesting do you find the magazine in general?"

** Responses to question "About how much time in total did you spend reading or looking into this particular issue?"

*** Responses to question "On how many separate occasions can you remember looking into it?"

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(8) These 'looking into' occasions are also highly susceptible to variance from *publication-to-publication*. Some suffer almost no variance; Magazine A shows actual spreads of only 3.7 to 4.1, others are far more inclined to vary; Magazine D, for example, ranged from a low of 4.2 to a high of 6.7 reading occasions.

(9) For number of occasions, variance by *target group or base* is also minimal with the exception of Magazine D (the general interest publication).

CONCLUSIONS

There is strong evidence to suggest that there is a relationship between the issue used in study and qualitative factors. However, this relationship is clearer for measures of TSR and number of occasions looked into than for editorial interest scores. While that would seem to be predictable because the latter (interest) scores are intended to be general to the magazine rather than the issue, this researcher believes it is more directly related to the narrow range of options available.

Having established that a relationship exists one may well question whether there is a further link between the three factors by issue. In other words, does a 'good' issue produce 'good' scores?

There is some evidence presented here to suggest that there is indeed a connection. An issue that produced a higher than average interest score will produce higher TSR and number of occasion scores. While there are many exceptions to this, there is an observable phenomenon: a very high interest scoring issues produces, almost invariably, high TSR and number of occasion data. Examples are (1) all persons 12+: Magazine A - Month III, Magazine C - Month IV, Magazine D - Month VI. (2) women 18+: Magazine B - Month IV, Magazine C - Month VI, Magazine D - Month I.

Having established the link between issue and qualitative data, and having suggested some consistency between these factors there remain other questions. First, is there a link between the 'real', total issue or is it directly attributable to skeletonising techniques? In other words, is the respondent answering based on memory of the actual reading event which took place six to eight weeks previously or are the responses triggered by the specific articles chosen for skeletonisation? Second, what causes 'good' scores?

These, unfortunately, are questions which cannot be answered within the scope of this paper. It is hoped by this researcher that the questions will be addressed elsewhere in this forum or in the future.