

ALTERNATIVE APPROACHES TO COLLECTING QUALITY OF READING DATA

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Background

Simmons presently collects quality of reading data in both the personal interview and the self-administered questionnaire. In the former, five consecutive questions are asked about each magazine previously determined to be a "read" while four such questions are included in the SAQ on pages that follow the screen-in and frequency of reading questions.

We find, however, that qualitative questions for magazines screened into are not always answered on these subsequent pages. This "no answer" phenomenon results in qualitative data inconsistent with expectations. We therefore asked, "What will happen if these qualitative questions are directly linked with the screens and frequencies?"

Test Objectives

While the primary objective was to find an improved method of collecting qualitative data there were also a number of secondary issues so these four questions needed to be answered as well:

- Will screen levels be impacted by this linking of the quality of reading questions with screens and frequencies?
- Will the frequency of reading distribution change as a result of additional questions?
- Will this new question have an effect on the demographic profile of responders?
- What, if any, are the implications for frequency-based studies?

Test Design

The first test was conducted in February and March of 1996 with these four qualitative questions joined with the screens and frequencies:

- Place of reading
 - In own home
 - Somewhere else
- Source of copy
 - Subscription
 - Store/newsstand
 - Other
- One of your favorites
- Cut coupons, articles or recipes

The test SAQ was identical to the standard SAQ in all respects other than the magazine pages, with 26 single column logos per page compared to the control's approximately 34 logos across two columns. The Spring 1996 SMM, conducted between February, 1995 and January, 1996, was used as the control. Only version A (of four possible rotations) was employed for both the test and control. In addition, the sample was limited to the balance of the US and did not include any of the 12 top DMAs. The test sample contained an in-tab of 1,247 and the control 3,562.

The 1997 test included only two of the four qualitative questions, retaining place of reading and source of copy. The number of titles per page was reduced to 20, thereby enlarging the logos. The sample for each included all markets as well as the balance of the US. The 1997 test, with an in-tab of 994, was conducted between May and July and compared to a control (5,233 in-tab) from the Fall 1997 SMM release (July, 1996 to June, 1997).

Because the two tests were conducted at different times of year and also utilized somewhat different samples, each test can and should be compared only to its own control, not to each other. All data were analyzed on an unweighted basis.

Test Results

Screen Levels

Table 1 demonstrates the average number of magazine titles screened into by total adults, men and women as well as by publication frequency.

Table 1: Average Screens

	1996			1997		
	Control	Test	Index	Control	Test	Index
Adults	17.76	11.69	66	16.11	13.24	82
Men	16.51	10.74	65	14.71	11.87	81
Women	19.03	12.65	66	17.60	14.56	83
Weeklies	3.95	3.05	77	3.79	3.49	92
Bi-weeklies	.57	.31	54	.52	.42	81
Tri-weeklies	.77	.59	77	.64	.54	84
Monthlies	10.99	6.90	63	9.86	7.83	79
Bi-monthlies	1.48	.84	57	1.31	.97	74

The decrease in screens in 1996 was greater than anticipated and was the primary reason to conduct a second test, one in which less data was collected per page. This was accomplished by reducing the number of titles on each page and eliminating two of the four qualitative questions. The overall effect was a positive one. While the screen-in levels were still below the control, the index had increased from 66 to 82.

Relatively speaking, in each test there appeared to be no difference in average screens between males and females. Weeklies experienced the highest index in both years while bi-weeklies fared better in 1997.

Frequency of Reading

We were curious to learn what impact there might be on claimed frequency of reading (Table 2) when respondents were now asked additional questions immediately following the five frequency options.

Table 2: Frequency of Reading

	1996 Test	1997 Test
< 1 of 4	88	86
1 of 4	95	96
2 of 4	106	110
3 of 4	97	108
4 of 4	114	110

(Control = 100)

With the exception of 1996's "3 out of 4", the two tests performed similarly as compared to their controls, with a shift towards two or more issues. The overall screen levels may have decreased somewhat, as seen in Table 1, but those respondents who do screen in appear more likely to be frequent readers, evidenced by the indices for 2, 3 and 4 of 4 issues.

Demographics

The third factor to be considered was the effect on the responder's demographic profile, as seen below in Table 3. Although demographics, along with magazine audiences, come from the personal interview, not the SAQ, we were still interested in any differences.

Table 3: Demographics

	1996 Test	1997 Test
Men	99	95
Women	101	105
18-34	97	88
35-54	98	107
55+	108	101
Att/grad college	91	97
Employed	99	102
Pro/mgr	91	110
Cler/sales/tech	85	91
Other employed	122	104
HHI \$75,000+	72	100
HHI \$50,000-\$74,999	91	111
HHI \$20,000-\$49,999	107	93
HHI < \$20,000	123	100

(Control = 100)

Greater differences, compared to the control, were found in the 1996 test. The demographic segments most effected were "clerical/sales/technical" and "other employed" within occupation and the two household income extremes of "\$75,000 or more" and "less than \$20,000".

Quality of Reading

Here, in Table 4, the concentration is on the 1997 test as the 1996 low screen levels were so disappointing we did not tabulate the quality of reading questions, having already made the decision to redesign the test.

Table 4: Quality of Reading (1997)
(Gross Screens)

	Control %	Test %
Place of reading		
Own home	34.6	39.1
Somewhere else	39.5	51.7
No answer	28.2	9.6
Source of copy		
Subscription	18.0	24.0
Store/newsstand	16.6	21.0
Other	29.5	46.0
No answer	37.0	9.5

Three differences were immediately apparent. First, the "no answer" phenomenon has been significantly reduced. In fact, for both place of reading and source of copy it has dropped to below 10%. Additionally, the "no answer" disparity between the first-asked and second-asked questions (28.2% vs. 37.0%) has been eliminated. And, finally, while the percent for each option within the two questions has increased, it is place of reading's "somewhere else" and source of copy's "other" that have experienced the most significant jump. This is a clear indication that secondary or pass-along readers are now more likely to answer.

Another comparison we made was to data collected in the personal interview (Fall 1997 SAR, version A) as seen in Table 5.

Table 5: Quality of Reading (1997)

	Personal Interview % (Gross Reads)	Test % (Gross Screens)
Place of reading		
Own home	54.2	39.1
Somewhere else	47.8	51.7
No answer	0.1	9.6
Source of copy		
Subscription	31.9	24.0
Store/newsstand	15.9	21.0
Other	51.9	46.0
No answer	0.3	9.5

These two groups are not strictly comparable, as the qualitative questions in the personal interview are asked only of "reads", not total screens, and the interviewer is capable of further reducing "no answers". However, it does enable us to see that the test provided data more in line with the personal interview than data currently in the SAQ (control).

Conclusions and Implications

Severely reduced screen-in levels in the 1996 test led to a redesigned test in which less data was collected on a single page. Although the second test produced relatively higher average screens they may still be lower than desired for benchmarking purposes. Further tests are indicated.

Despite these screen-in levels the linking of screens and frequencies with two qualitative questions in the 1997 test demonstrated improved data and a reduction in "no answers".

Simmons does not use the SAQ to determine either magazine audiences or demographics for the SMM - this is the purpose of the personal interview. There are, however, several US studies that are frequency-based. These include three Simmons studies - CompPro, Top Management and Hispanic - as well as Mendelsohn, Adams, Purchase Influence of American Business, Opinion Leaders, IQ CIMS, FARMS and JD Power. For these, and any other direct mail studies using frequency of reading to determine AIA, there are implications when additional questions are linked to the screen and frequency question. The potential effects, demonstrated by the Simmons tests, include:

- lowered screen levels
- redistribution of frequencies (higher percentage of 2, 3 and 4 out of 4)
- altered demographic profile

References

Douglas, Stephen A. & Jones, Richard D. "Frequency of Reading for AIA: Under Researched?" Berlin 1995 Readership Symposium.