

6.6 The effect of age of issue and origin of copy on readership results

INTRODUCTION

Based on the first Readership Symposium in New Orleans and on articles that have appeared in the technical press in different countries, it is obvious that there are marked differences in the readership results achieved via the various methods for measuring magazine audiences.

That first symposium also showed that researchers are aware of the shortcomings of the different approaches and that there are pros and cons for the various methods.

It is also apparent that the high readers per copy figures that surveys provide often result in serious doubts as to the credibility of the survey results.

In this paper I put forward some thoughts on the possible main cause of readership inflation and trust that my ideas may be tested in other countries. My hypotheses and conclusions are mainly aimed at the Recent Reading method but may also apply to the Frequency of Reading method.

SETTING THE SCENE

At a meeting of eight well-known South African advertisers, the question was asked "If a person reads a magazine that is 2 years old, is that a worthwhile OTS or not?" Four of the advertisers said "It doesn't worry us, our ads haven't really changed for years — the basic ideas we're trying to put across are still the same". The other four advertisers claimed that "2-year old ads are quite useless to us — prices change so fast that after a few months the ad could be misleading".

This is one side of the problem. The other side is, if a lot of people are qualifying as readers in our surveys via old issues, to what extent does this influence the number of readers per copy that we record? The high rpc of some publications is without doubt the major factor that leads to lack of credibility in the case of readership surveys.

Over the years we have investigated well over 40 factors; rpc is but one of them and it is of vital concern to us to find out to what extent readers are in fact qualifying via old issues.

In 1981 we decided to undertake a pilot survey:

(a) To establish to what extent informants are reading old copies of magazines.

(b) To check on duplicate claiming within the same household.

(c) To check the possible inflationary effects of old copy reading.

(d) To establish to what extent rpc can be affected through public place reading.

Towards the end of the fieldwork period of AMPS 1981, in cases where we could get back to informants quickly, we recontacted people who had read certain publications during the most recent issue period. They were recontacted by telephone and the interview went something like this: "Mr. Jones, one of our interviewers interviewed you a few days ago and you claimed to be a reader of certain publications. There were one or two questions they didn't ask you and we would appreciate it if you could please answer these questions for us. You said you read *Scope* — can you please tell me where you read it?" If they claimed they had read it in their own homes, we then asked them "Do you think you can still lay your hands on the last copy of *Scope* that you read?" If the informant then found the copy we asked "What is the date of the copy?"

In the case of public places we did not question people; we just went to a cross-section of barber shops, beauty parlours, hairdressers, etc. In these places we did a complete inventory of the available magazines. We recorded the titles, the number of copies of each title, and the age of each copy was noted via the date on the cover.

This paper is based on:

(1) A detailed analysis of the results of AMPS '79 as far as it referred to the origin of the last copy read.

(2) A follow-up check on 382 AMPS '81 informants who had read one or more copies of 11 test magazines during their most recent issue period.

(3) An inventory check of all the magazines found in 50 typical 'public places' (eg hairdressers, barbers etc.).

(4) A consumer survey in which 1000 people were questioned on the extent to which they visit 'public places'.

These were pilot studies, not nationwide comprehensive surveys. In the in-home study we followed up on 382 readers, and fieldwork was limited to Johannesburg, Durban, Cape Town, Pretoria, Kimberley and Potchefstroom — a reasonable cross-section of cities and towns. The public place study

6.6 The effects of age of issue and origin of copy on readership results

covered 50 public places and was limited to Johannesburg and Cape Town. Let us now take a quick look at the findings. Please remember that these results should be used as a guide only.

Table 1 shows the proportion of the magazines read in the recent past that consisted of current issues. On the whole, 57% of the readers of this cross-section of magazines had qualified via a current issue. In the second column we show the proportion that qualified via issues between 2 and 6 periods old. This column shows that on average we are adding another 22%. Readers who qualified via issues over 6 periods old are shown in Column 3 and accounted for, on average, 21% of readers. The average qualifying age with the in-home reading was 3.2 issue-periods. The table therefore summarises the aspect of accepted readers qualifying via current issues or older issues.

TABLE 1
Age of 'last issue' read in the home

MAGAZINE	AGE OF 'LAST' ISSUE			Av. Age in Periods
	Current	2-6 Periods	Over 6 Periods	
	%	%	%	
Family Radio & TV	67	14	19	3.5
Farmers Weekly	-	50	50	5.3
Scope	50	27	23	3.2
Huisgenoot	40	44	16	2.3
Keur	33	21	46	5.9
Landbouweekblad	27	27	46	5.0
Radio en TV Dagboek	42	19	39	4.0
Fair Lady	64	20	16	2.3
Sarie	61	18	21	2.8
Car	55	42	3	3.8
Reader's Digest	60	26	14	2.3
Average of above	57	22	21	3.2

Let us now take a quick look at the findings in the public place check.

In the case of the public places we found one current issue of a woman's magazine, *Fair Lady*. All the other publications were older. Those beyond the current and up to 6 months old are shown in the second column of **Table 2**. The issues that go further back into the past are shown under Columns 3 and 4. The average age of the magazines recorded in this inventory was 11

months. I leave it to you as to whether this should be considered a 'worthwhile' age or not. It is an interesting subject for debate. The oldest issue we found was a copy of the *Reader's Digest* from 1954 — 27 years old.

TABLE 2
'Age' distribution of publications in public places

PUBLICATION	% IN EACH AGE GROUP				Av. Age in months
	Current Issue	Up to 6 months	7-12 months	Over 1yr old	
	%	%	%	%	
Family Radio & TV	-	45	19	36	10
Farmers Weekly	-	3	8	89	17
Scope	-	47	13	40	10
Huisgenoot	-	84	10	6	4
Keur	-	16	9	75	15
Radio en TV Dagboek	-	17	13	70	14
Fair Lady	1	47	23	20	9
Sarie	-	65	20	15	7
Car	-	33	11	56	11
Reader's Digest	-	20	12	68	15
Average	-	41	15	44	11

Other data that we collected in the public place study is shown in **Table 3**. The average number of daily visitors to these places was 49 people. The average number of publications found was 32 and the average age was 11 months. The average 'business life' is an aspect that I brought into the survey because I thought it was warranted. If offices or waiting rooms are closed on Saturdays and Sundays then nobody will be visiting these public places and they cannot therefore provide an opportunity to see the magazines.

In addition we also made allowance for public holidays and 'an initial period' before the magazine was probably placed in the 'public place'. The active 'business life' we allowed was 200 'working days'. At this figure the total maximum OTS for all publications was 9800 (ie 200 X 49) for their life-to-date!

Although the pick-up-probability of individual copies is fairly complicated (see **Table 4**) we used the 'straight' probability of dividing the all-publication OTS figure by 32 — the average number of magazines found in the average public place.

Let us take a closer look at the 'public place' probabilities (**Table 4**). A person goes into a public place.

6.6 The effects of age of issue and origin of copy on readership results

TABLE 3
Some other facts about the public places visited

Please remember that this was a pilot survey limited to 50 places.

INFORMATION	FINDINGS
1 Average number of daily 'Visitors'	49 people
2 Average number of publications	32
3 Average Age of average publication	11 months
4 'Active Business Life' Age of publication up to date of check	200 days
5 Total maximum OTS All publications during life-to-date (1x4)	9800 OTS
6 'Straight' probability per publication (5 ÷ 2)	306 OTS

TABLE 4
How do we establish pick-up-probability?

- There are 'N' copies in the room
 - One person comes in....
 - What are the factors controlling his/her likelihood of picking up one publication and paging through it?
- Time spent waiting.
 - How big is 'N' ie how many magazines are in the room?
 - Number of copies of the same title available.
 - Target sex of the publication (eg Fair Lady).
 - Sex of the visitor, client, patient, customer.
 - The number of 'visitors' in the room at any one time.
 - Age of the issue (Topicality).
 - Popularity of the publication.
 - The visitor's previous visits to this establishment.**

There is a pile of magazines on the table. What is the probability of one of them being picked up? We can accept that there are 32 magazines, so the probability is 1 out of 32. But there are other aspects, such as the time spent waiting: if Mr. Jones is only there for a couple of minutes and is then called in by the doctor/dentist, that is the end of the scene. There are numerous other factors than can play a part in the pick-up-probability. Most of them are listed: they are virtually self-explanatory, and

clearly illustrate that it is a complicated problem to establish a specific publication's pick-up-probability in a specific establishment.

A big 'loophole' in our pilot check-back study was Item 9 in **Table 4**, ie the 'visitor's' previous visits to that particular establishment. In **Table 3** we credited the average publication in the average public place with 306 OTS during the publication's *life-to-date*. The problem is, do these 306 OTS consist of 306 different people visiting that 'public place' once during the 11 months or does it consist of 40 weekly visits from only 8 different people? (see **Table 5**).

TABLE 5
Extending the public place findings

Basic figures used

Days available in Public Places	200
Maximum theoretical OTS Readers	306

Frequency of visits	Av. visits in 200 days	Maximum OTS Readers
Once in 200 days	1	306
Once a quarter	3	102
Once a month	9	34
Once a fortnight	20	15
Once a week	40	8

Check Study	12	26
--------------------	-----------	-----------

To throw further light on this problem we undertook a consumer survey in January 1983 to check on informants' visits to 'public places'. The findings of this study, among, 1000 White informants, are shown in **Table 6**.

Based on the findings of this follow-up survey the average number of visits of the 'average' informant to the 'average' public place during the life-to-date (11 months) of the average publication was 12 visits. In other words, 26 different people were responsible for the 306 OTS during the period of 11 months. Please remember this figure of 26 because we will use it again in our summary.

ORIGIN OF THE 'LAST COPY' READ

In the South African All Media and Products Survey (AMPS) the 'When last read' question is completed by means of a detailed sorting board which makes it possible to check on the origin question under 10 'When last' headings, as in **Table 7**.

In the 1979 large scale AMPS survey (16,060

6.6 The effects of age of issue and origin of copy on readership results

TABLE 6
Summary of public place visits

Public places	Visited in 3m % pop. %	No. of visits in 3 months Av. No.	No. of visits in 11 months Av. No.
1 Attorneys, Lawyers	11.2	3.0	11.0
2 Beauty Parlour	4.8	2.9	10.6
3 Dentist	25.9	1.7	6.2
4 Doctor	57.4	2.8	10.3
5 Hairdresser/Barber	61.2	2.9	10.6
6 Library	27.3	7.9	29.0
7 Veterinary	16.2	1.7	6.2
8 All others	5.8	5.2	19.1
NONE OF THEM	8.7	—	—

TABLE 7
When last read scale

1	One Day ago, ie 'yesterday'	
2	Two Days ago	
3	Three Days ago	DAYS AGO
4	4 to 7 Days ago	
5	8 to 14 Days ago	
6	3 to 4 Weeks ago	
7	5 to 6 Weeks ago	WEEKS AGO
8	7 to 12 Weeks ago	
9	4 to 6 Months ago	MONTHS AGO
10	7 to 12 Months ago	

Informants) we cross-tabulated the 'when last read' replies against the origin of the last copy. This cross-tabulation was done for 'Yesterday', the 'Past 3 days' and during the 'Most recent' issue period.

Time not permitting the detailed reporting of these findings, I once again limit my comments to the 'average' publication.

The origin of the 'average' publication was as shown in **Table 8**.

The findings of these cross-tabulations also showed that as the 'when last read' period increased the proportion of readers who claimed their 'last copy' originated in their own home declined steadily. (See **Figure** and **Table 10** for further details).

TABLE 8

Origin	%
Within own home (ie Subscribe, bought self or obtained from member of own family)	66.8
Obtained from friend	16.3
Read elsewhere	16.9

PUTTING IT ALL TOGETHER

Based on the limited findings of the in-home and public-place studies and the more detailed findings of the large AMPS and the consumer survey we can now try putting it all together.

(1) The number of adults per reader-household differs for the different publications (see **Table 9**). The overall average for *all* the magazines covered in AMPS was 2.8 (this average figure is rather 'peculiar' as it is the average of a bi-modal distribution. For discussion purposes this does not materially affect our conclusions).

(2) The average age of the 'read-in-home' issue was 3.2 issue periods.

(3) The average age of the 'public place' copies was 11 months.

(4) During the 11 months life-to-date period the average 'public place' magazine had 26 different OTS 'readers'.

(5) The origin of the 'last' issue read was....

66.8% within the readers own home

16.3% from a friend

16.9% from a 'public place'

(6) In the case of subscribers and 'self' buyers the first OTS of a publication, should, in the vast majority of cases have occurred when the publication was 'current' or only 1 period old.

6.6

The effects of age of issue and origin of copy on readership results

TABLE 9
Number of adults in magazine reading households

Household Size (Adults)	Magazine Studied						
2.2							
2.3	L.BOU						
2.4	G&H	CAR	Srgn.	R.R	SARIE	F.W	R.TV
2.5	Y.F.	F.LADY	FRTV	F.M	TTP	H.G	
2.6	R.D	DARL.	SCOPE	TIME			
2.7	L&L						
2.8							
2.9	SH.SH						
3.0	DRUM	T.L	HIT	BONA			
3.1							
3.2							

(7) If visual verification of 'self' buyers or subscribers shows that these readers are qualifying using the Recent Reading method, via 'old' copies then it is reasonable to assume that they could have qualified via these same copies on previous occasions — that is, that replication could have occurred.

(8) The extent to which such replication can occur is dependent on....

(a) the frequency of reading patterns of the informant;

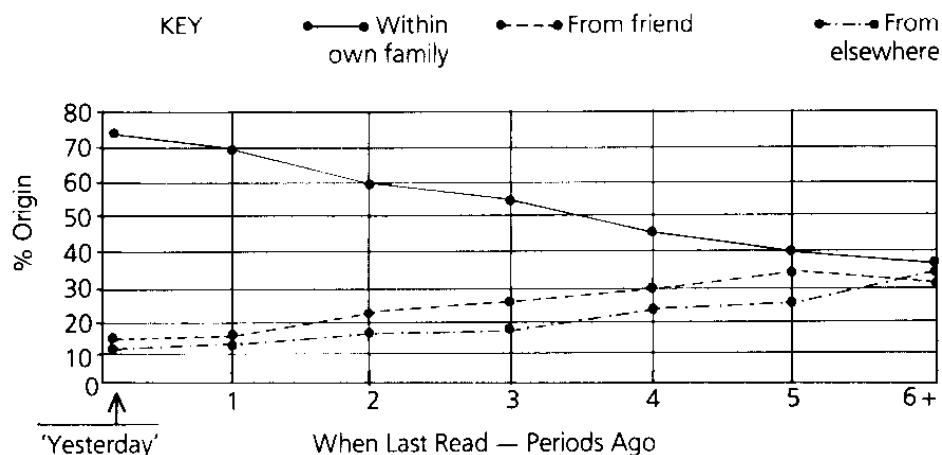
(b) the number of 'gaps' within that frequency group;

(c) the origin of the last copy read by that informant.

(9) If the above comments are accepted as hypotheses then we can theoretically calculate the extent to which replication has occurred or can occur via a combination of the three factors listed under point 8 above plus the average age of the 'last copy' via which the claimed reader qualified. Let us examine the findings logically and systematically.

FIGURE
When last read vs. origin of copy

Source: Average of 6 magazines from AMPS '79



6.6

The effects of age of issue and origin of copy on readership results

APPLYING THE RESULTS

(10) It is reasonable to accept that 'yesterday's' reading claims will be the most accurate. **Table 10** shows average 'last issue' origin comparisons for 'yesterday', 'the past 3 days' and the most recent issue period for 10 test publications....

(11) It can clearly be seen that the origin of the 10 test magazines and the other magazines are in the same ball park. It can also be seen that there is very little difference between the 'Yesterday' origin results and the issue period origin results.

(12) Seeing that most media data are expressed in terms of thousands let us convert the origin information for the 'average' test publication to this base (**Table 11**). But the rpc figure of 3.2 here compares with an AMPS average of 8.1. Why this difference?

(13) After taking a good look at these findings the writer came to the following conclusions...

(i) Public place reading based on the 'yesterday', 'past 3 days' and 'most recent' issue-period origin analysis (see **Table 10**) cannot possibly account for the high rpc of the test publications.

(ii) Comparing the average number of adults in all

magazine reading households, from the main AMPS survey, (2.8) with the average household size of the ten test magazines (2.5) and with the back-check informants claiming that there were, on average, 1.7 other readers of the test magazines in their own households it would appear that virtually all adults in reader households usually qualify as OTS 'readers' of most of the magazines that enter these homes.

(iii) With the average age of the 'last' or 'qualifying' issue of the test publications being 3.2 issue-periods it is reasonable to assume that readers could have qualified via the same copies during 2.2 previous issue periods.

(iv) If the high rpc of certain magazines were built-up via their passage through a number of different households then the proportion of readers that claimed they obtained their 'last' copy from a friend *must* be higher than the 14% to 16% recorded in AMPS (see **Table 12**). The average magazine-reading household contains 2.8 adults. If, after each issue period, the publication were handed on to another household it could, theoretically, gain a further 2.8 adult readers in the 'new' household

If for example the publication gained 2.8 readers in the first household, 2.8 readers in the second and 2.8 readers in the third, then 67% of in-home readers should

TABLE 10
Origin vs. when last read

Average 'last issue' origin	'Yesterday' figures 10 mags. %	'Past 3 days' figures 10 mags. %	Most recent issue period 10 mags. %	AMPS '79 issue period 24 mags. %
A. From own home	70	71	70	67
B. From friend	15	14	16	16
C. From elsewhere	15	15	14	17
TOTAL WITHIN PERIOD	100	100	100	100

TABLE 11
Origin, readers and RPC

A. Last issue origin	B. No. of readers	C. Possible RPC	D. No. of copies needed
From own home	700	2.5	280
From friends home	160	5.0	32
From elsewhere	140	26.0	5
TOTAL	1000	3.2	317

6.6 The effects of age of issue and origin of copy on readership results

be claiming that their copies were obtained "from a friend".

If all the above findings are put together then the writer contends that the major contributory factor to the high rpc figures that are recorded via the Recent Reading method is the result of *replication*, that is people are

qualifying as readers via the same copy during a number of different issue-periods. (see **Table 13**).

(14) It would also appear that results via the Frequency method (used for magazines in South Africa) is inflated by replication in that the multiple picking up of the same issue during different issue-periods creates the

TABLE 12
Pass along readership and rpc

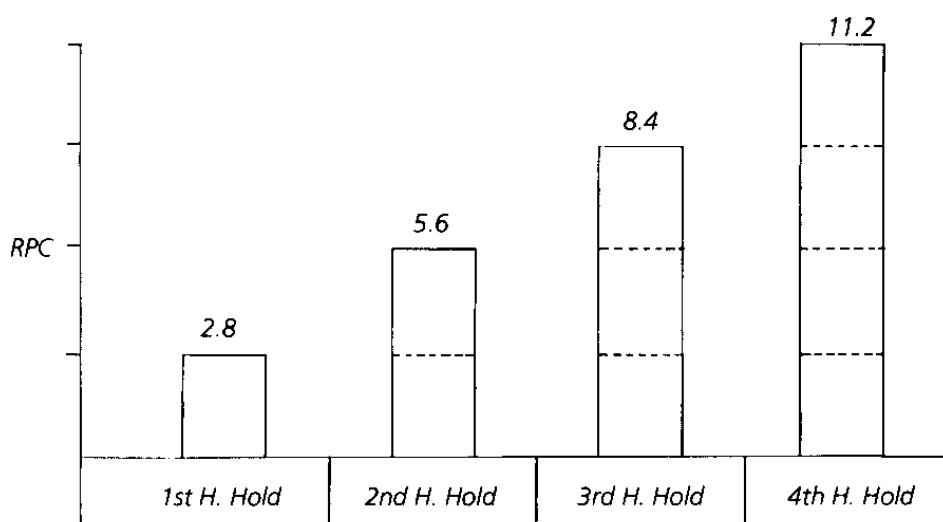


TABLE 13
Issue age, household size and rpc

Magazine	A. Av. age in periods	B. Av. rdr. Household size	C. Deducted RPC (A X B)	D. AMPS RPC
Family Radio & TV	3.5	2.5	8.7	10.5
Farmers Weekly	5.3	2.4	12.7	15.4
Scope	3.2	2.6	8.3	8.6
Huisgenoot	2.3	2.5	5.7	5.1
Landbouweekblad	5.0	2.3	11.5	8.9
Radio en TV Dagboek	4.0	2.4	9.6	10.6
Fair Lady	2.3	2.5	5.7	6.6
Sarie	2.8	2.4	6.7	5.5
Car	3.8	2.4	9.1	8.2
Reader's Digest	2.3	2.6	6.0	5.8
Average of above	3.2	2.5	8.0	8.1

6.6 The effects of age of issue and origin of copy on readership results

"impression" of greater frequency than actually occurs. For example, only about 8 out of 10 people who claim to read every issue of a publication do in fact do so!

(15) By the way, in a large scale memory-decay experiment we undertook in 1975 (see pages 71 to 78 of my book 'Reliability of Response in Readership Research') we actually observed people reading specific magazines in public places. Recontacting these *observed readers* showed that only 59% of them recognised the specific issues they had actually been observed reading. This figure of 59% compares closely with an average figure of 61% reported by Marder in the USA. The reason why these figures are being mentioned is that the use of Through the book as a means of validation for public-place reading is by no means the reliable 'tool' some researchers claim. Among buyer-readers our check-back recognition ran at 92% over a period of up to 12 weeks.

(16) If origin data could be collected for the 'last' issue read in the case of Through the Book measurement then one could theoretically 'correct' the Through the Book data to allow for memory decay.

(17) If my contention or hypothesis that publications "gain readers" via replication and that the extent to which they do so is a function of (a) the 'average age' of

the last issue read during the most recent issue-period, and (b) the average number of adults in *reader households*, then it should be possible to test this approach in different countries. **Table 14** illustrates the concept. For example, if the average 'qualifying age' of a specific publication is 2.0 issue periods and the average adult household size *among readers* of that publication is 2.3 then the "predicted" rpc via the R.R. method would be in the region of 4.6

(18) This theory is a preliminary one, based on small incomplete samples, but the correlation achieved with the test publications (shown under the last 2 columns of **Table 13**) is reasonable and the total "predicted" figure of 8.0 rpc versus the large scale AMPS survey of 8.1 looks promising.

(19) We do not have detailed data on the situation in America but with information gathered from Timothy Joyce's "Recent Reading" booklet, Simmons, and ARF studies, I have compiled **Table 15**.

The writer cannot see how differences of 67% to 80% in total and 81% to 105% in the case of monthlies can be caused by "minor errors". The average life-to-date theory can explain such major differences.

TABLE 14
Household size, age of 'last' issue and rpc

Number of adults in reader households	Average 'age' of 'last' issue read									
	1.0	1.5	2.0	2.5	3.0	3.5	4.0	4.5	5.0	6.0
2.2	2.2	3.3	4.4	5.5	6.6	7.7	8.8	9.9	11.0	13.2
2.3	2.3	3.4	4.6	5.8	6.9	8.0	9.2	10.4	11.5	13.8
2.4	2.4	3.6	4.8	6.0	7.2	8.4	9.6	10.8	12.0	14.4
2.5	2.5	3.8	5.0	6.2	7.5	8.8	10.0	11.2	12.5	15.0
2.6	2.6	3.9	5.2	6.5	7.8	9.1	10.4	11.7	13.0	15.6
2.7	2.7	4.0	5.4	6.8	8.1	9.4	10.8	12.2	13.5	16.2
2.8	2.8	4.2	5.6	7.0	8.4	9.8	11.2	12.6	14.0	16.8
2.9	2.9	4.4	5.8	7.2	8.7	10.2	11.6	13.0	14.5	17.4
3.0	3.0	4.5	6.0	7.5	9.0	10.5	12.0	13.5	15.0	18.0

6.6 The effects of age of issue and origin of copy on readership results

TABLE 15
Comparative data from the USA

In a 3-way test undertaken in American by the ARF and Mediamark, the following figures emerged:

		ARF studies		Mediamark
Magazine group		A. Through the book	B. Recency	C. Recency
Av. 12 weeklies	%	7.0	9.8	10.1
	Index	100	126	129
Av. 2 Tri-weeklies	%	10.8	19.2	19.0
	Index	100	178	176
Av. 53 monthlies	%	3.7	7.6	6.7
	Index	100	205	181
Av. All 67 mags	%	4.6	8.3	7.7
	Index	100	180	167

(20) It is also rather interesting that if the "In-home" and "Public-Place" South African memory decay levels are applied to the USA figures in **Table 15** above, then we obtain the pattern shown in **Table 16**.

TABLE 16
Rough check via some USA figures

A	Average TTB magazine audience figure. (See Table 15).	4.6%
B	Average TTB figure (A) 'corrected' for 'memory decay' (see point 15)	5.6%
C	Average age of 'last' issue read — based on coupon return analysis. 1.54 'periods'	
D	'Memory corrected' TTB audience (ie B) 'stepped-up' via estimated average issue-age (C) That is 5.6% X 1.54 Issue-periods.	= 8.6%
E	Result via ARF's Recency method (see Table 15)	= 8.3%
	Result via Mediamark's Recency method (see Table 15)	= 7.7%

(21) The above and Points 15 and 17 are *very rough* outlines of what the writer believes *may* be happening via the Recent Reading method.

To test the theory via large scale properly planned and controlled surveys in a cross-section of countries the following steps would be required:

- Step 1 Complete the 'normal' readership (RR, Frequency or TTB).
- Step 2 Note all the most recent issue-period readers.
- Step 3 Ask most recent issue-period readers about the origin of the 'last copy' that they read.
- Step 4 *Visually verify* wherever possible, the *published date* of all the 'Test' publications read 'In-the-home' during the *most recent issue period*.
- Step 5 From the main survey (Step 2) calculate the average number of adults within the publications reader-households.
- Step 6 Through the combination of issue-age, origin and reader household size, calculate the maximum theoretical RPC.
- Step 7 Compare the results via this method against those of a "memory corrected" Through the book method.

(22) To date the writer has investigated 46 factors that affect readership results. Some showed promise, some were 'lemons' — I do not know where this theory will fall. I can however leave with one last thought — there is nothing like a little research to upset a perfectly good theory.