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7.6 The affinity index as a measure of contact quality

Gruner + Jahr has participated in the development of market research methods for measuring the relationship between readers and periodicals since the beginning of market research activities in Germany in the early Fifties.

One result was an 'Affinity Index' which has been developed and applied in four major surveys (some 5,000 - 6,000 interviews) since 1974. The fourth was published in May 1982 and enabled an affinity index to be established for 35 periodicals and two TV networks.

The affinity index developed in the *Stern* surveys "Profiles" 1 to 3, is now being offered in a systematically improved form as an additional media-planning instrument.

In Profiles media potentials are also evaluated qualitatively. This means that over and above purely media usage data on the pattern of the German Media-Analyse (MA) the opportunity is provided of evaluating the quality of the relationship between medium and user.

There are a host of good reasons for measuring, not only the quantity of relationships between media and their users, but also for assessing the quality of these. Very early on, extra attention was paid to one aspect of this — the reader-paper link.

The development of this new direction in research took place within the framework of the general tendency for complementing the quantitative data hitherto preferred by the addition of qualitative criteria.

It is certain that as long as this area is researched on a points basis, it is not possible to create that comprehensive measure of media effectiveness which planning requirements call for.

Profiles 4 attempts — as did Profiles 1 to 3 — to do justice to the multi-dimensionality of reader affinity. In order to distinguish the research contents of Profiles from that of other research, the German term 'Zuwendung' was selected, meaning 'inclination' or 'affinity'.

By this is meant the phenomenon whereby media users can be sharply differentiated in accordance with how strongly they identify with the individual medium. The scheme for Profiles is also based on this proposition (see **Figure 1**).

Towards the medium concerned, the media user displays: specific (positive, neutral or negative) attitudes; and specific patterns of behaviour (eg, intensive/fleeting reading; long/short duration of usage; concentrated/interrupted usage).

As an overall phenomenon, these attitudes and behavioural patterns typify the degree of affinity with the medium concerned. Affinity also determines to what extent the advertising in the medium concerned can be effective.

In accordance with this concept, affinity can be defined as a media-specific individual weighting. In other words: It marks the individual receptivity of separate individuals — in each case in respect of a specific medium — to advertising; It puts a figure on the probability of usage by one person, something which had initially been recorded only quantitatively, in order to incorporate an assessment of probability into the calculation of the probability of usage; The results are then soundly-based coverage data or relationship clusters, which express the proportion of media contacts which are effective in terms of advertising, among other things.

Affinity with media was established by means of a list of 12 statements, with every reader having to give an appropriate graded response for every title.

The statements for print media were as follows:

(1) I usually read all the articles in this periodical.

(2) I could easily do without this periodical

(3) If necessary, I would go to great trouble to obtain every issue of this magazine.

(4) One simply *has to* take the time to read this periodical.

(5) There are other periodicals which I like better than this one.

(6) This periodical has never disappointed me.

(7) When reading this periodical I need peace and quiet and prefer not to be disturbed.

(8) I always look forward to the next issue of this periodical.

(9) This periodical often contains articles which provide a basis for discussion.

(10) This periodical often contains articles which occupy my thoughts for long afterwards.

(11) This periodical provides the kind of information which I expect from a quality periodical of this nature.

(12) I certainly don't agree with all the contents and opinions expressed in this periodical.

A multiple-choice response was given to each of these statements as follows:

(1) Entirely agree

(2) Mostly agree

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FIGURE 1

Media user =
Addressee for
advertising

Medium

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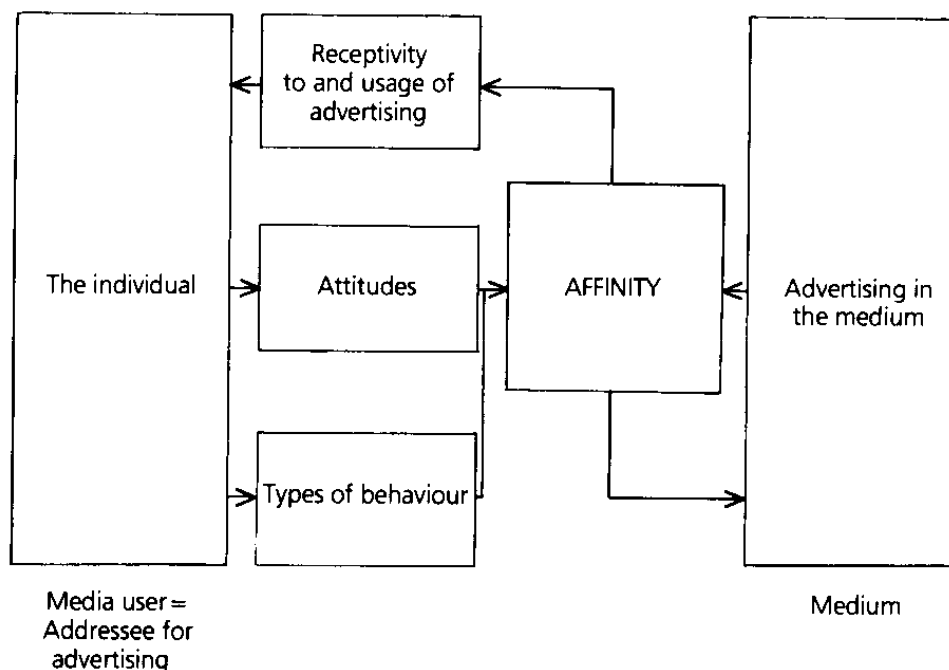
(3) Agree only partly

(4) Do not agree at all

The following aspects are covered by the statements used in the study:

(1) How is the medium used as regards usage intensity and user involvement?

(2) To what extent do the users identify with the medium?

(3) Amongst the more emotional factors measured are the level of disappointment (if the medium is not available) and the level of anticipation of a new issue.

(4) What importance does the medium have as a source of information; do its contents provide a source for discussion; what is the retention duration of the information provided?

(5) Does absorption of the material provided demand a high degree of concentration; does one prefer to be alone or undisturbed while using the medium?

The 12 statements provide the basis for calculating the affinity index. The next stage was to carry out a factor analysis, which resulted in three dimensions.

Dimension 1: This indicates an involved inclination to the medium, connected with a strong attachment of an emotional nature.

Dimension 2: This indicates the importance of the medium as a source of information (provides basis for

discussion, occupies one's thoughts longafterwards,etc.).

Dimension 3: This indicates an objective, directed usage of the medium, with heavier concentration on the contents.

An analysis of the contents of the statements showed that affinity is multi-dimensional; all statements measure at least one dimension of affinity, albeit to varying degrees; the three dimensions represent varying components of affinity, yet they also measure common components of the inclination to media.

The calculation of an index figure per person and per title, ie of a medium-related individual weighting, was done on the basis of a formula in which the various factors were analysed, and moreover in such a way that affinity per person for each title could be presented on a scale from 1 to 100, with an average of 50.

This index value on a continuous basis can be directly correlated (for example with the number of readers per copy). Apart from that, the individual index figures indicate a variety for information: a value of 70 indicates, for example, that the respondent has an above-average affinity to the medium, that the affinity level exceeds the average by 20 index points, and that 15 percent of all respondents have higher index values (extreme values occur less frequently than average values).

In carrying out the tests to develop the affinity index, a series of surveys were carried out with the sole purpose of examining a range of criteria to check the quality of the index. These different aspects included: objectivity; reliability; validity.

The objectivity of the execution and evaluation is guaranteed to a large extent by the completely standardised sampling and index calculation methods. The interpretation of the results is made completely independent of the person carrying out the evaluation calculations, thanks to the adjusted measurement scale.

An initial indication of the sound reliability of the survey is provided by a comparison of the affinity index

distribution for several reading and noting tests, in each of which readers of the same periodical were interviewed. Only very marginal variations can be observed in both average values and distribution in the case of six surveys carried out over a period of ten weeks by a weekly periodical.

The reliability coefficients lie within the upper levels of the values generally reached with psychological (personality) tests. The measuring scale developed is therefore sufficiently reliable — ie the measurement values have a high degree of exactitude.

A very important criterion for indicating the quality of a measuring scale is the validity aspect: indicators of

FIGURE 2
Impact and recognition of advertisements
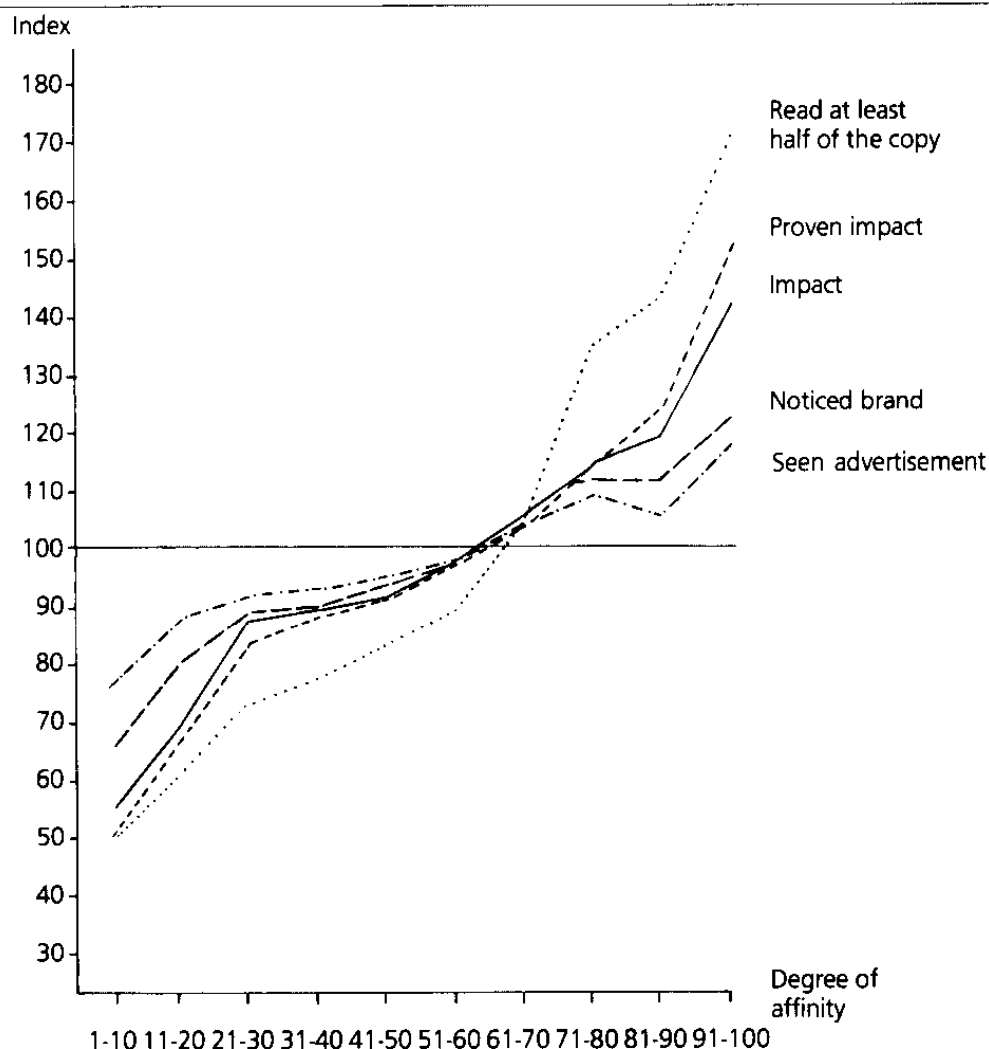
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the validity of an affinity index as a complex measurement of the media user's degree of inclination are the relationships with various individual aspects of inclination.

As part of the task of validating the affinity index, a check was made *(inter alia)* on what relationships existed between the degree of affinity and the attention paid to advertisements. The results are derived from a series of 15 reading and noting tests, made with nine periodicals, and were based on a total of 3,064 interviews.

Five validation yardsticks were used for affinity. So that the figures could be compared with one another, the findings were indexed, the average figure for each indicator being set at 100 and expressions of the various degrees of affinity indexed accordingly. This enabled direct comparisons to be made between changes in validation indicators dependent on affinity (see **Figure 2**).

It can be seen that the affinity index is very sharply differentiated, even in respect of the advertising effectiveness indicators. It is noticeable that the stricter the criterion for effectiveness, and the more this demands in terms of active affinity, the more strongly differentiated the affinity. This applies especially to 'proven impact' and 'half and more of advertisement text' read.

The affinity index is therefore clearly *one* indicator of advertisement impact and indicates the prerequisite for advertisement impact which results from the relationship between a medium and its users. To what extent a single campaign/advertisement/spot actually

has impact depends on many other criteria, such as the creativity of the ad, use of colour, current mood of the respondent, previous awareness of the brand etc.

The affinity index in Profiles means that a criterion has been created for evaluating the quality of contacts which: covers all significant factors — ie, behaviour and attitudes — in one combined index figure, and indeed in accordance with the importance these possess in the formation of such a link; differentiates between media, and moreover according to the degree of affinity which the user demonstrates with these; has validity, ie, stands in direct and significant relationship to the chance of achieving contact with advertising; through its presentation as a media-specific personal weighting can be taken in conjunction with coverage data, and therefore employed in all the normal programs used in the practice of media planning.

In using the affinity index for purposes of media planning there are two separate possibilities: The affinity index is used as an additional selective target group criterion — eg all readers with an affinity of 50 and over (readers with above-average affinity) are included in the plans; The other method is to directly include the affinity index in planning as a (media-linked) personal weighting factor. The condition for using this method is given by the construction of a 1 - 100 scale.

The affinity index in *Stern* Profiles represents an important step towards supplementing the differentiated range of information available in the field of market potentials with an equally differentiated range in the field of media potentials.