

9.3 Editorial research on a syndicated basis

BACKGROUND

Newspapers in Denmark

On an average weekday the majority of the Danish population read newspapers: 55% read only one, 30% read two or more and only 15% do not read a newspaper at all.

These figures were found in 1982 by aided recall (Danish discs), following the Belson model. Currently we have 39 local and 10 national dailies. These are mostly sold by subscription, the exceptions being the two biggest newspapers — of the popular type in a tabloid format. With three exceptions they all belong to the omnibus type and nearly all in a broadsheet format.

Syndicated media research in Denmark

Dansk Media Komite was established in 1967 by the publishers' associations and from the beginning the provincial papers have stressed their desire to get figures in the same way as the big national media.

Naturally we have had some problems in getting, within a reasonable amount of money, valid figures not only for the biggest weekly with its circulation of around 400,000 copies but also for the smallest daily which has a circulation of around 1,500.

In 1978 we changed the sampling procedure very radically, and the principles were described in a paper read at the ESOMAR congress in Bristol in 1978. Since that time only minor changes have taken place, so the basic principle is still to set up in the provinces a sample for each local daily, not a national sample (the sampling frame in the capital area is still based on demographic information).

In 1978 the sample size was quite large, so it seemed quite natural to give figures for each daily — figures which might have some meaning to the editors who in many cases are the people having the final decision on payments for syndicated media research. In vain have we tried to convince the journalists and editors about the value of demographic information for editors etc. Therefore we explored the possibility of getting information even closer to the work of the journalists, and have succeeded to a considerably greater extent in establishing contact with the writing people.

ADVANTAGES AND DISADVANTAGES

Advantages

The first and very obvious advantage is that it is much cheaper for a single medium to get the information in question when it is done in a syndicated survey.

Next, it is a way of getting contact with journalists who *a priori* dislike market research, and perhaps this in the long run will be the greatest advantage, bearing in mind the role these people play, both directly and indirectly, in financing syndicated surveys.

Disadvantages

The first disadvantage is that it is necessary to use the same questionnaire for all the media included. The consequence is that we can ask only about columns and features which are found in most Danish dailies, and these have different designations in the various publications.

The other great disadvantage is that the questions cannot be topical — and this is a disadvantage in the case of daily newspapers. For economic reasons the questions are asked together with the ordinary media questions, the whole year round, and for smaller publications it is necessary to add eg figures found in May with equivalent figures from November. From some points of view this is also a great disadvantage in comparison with TV viewing, which is very much influenced by the weather.

THE TECHNIQUE USED

Establishing the sample

As has been mentioned above, the editorial questions were asked in the same interviews as the ordinary media questions. As the investigation concerned daily newspapers we asked only about the newspaper read yesterday and this procedure mostly defined which newspaper the interview should relate to. However, for the 30% reading more than one daily we had for economic reasons to restrict questioning to one title.

For this purpose we introduced the 'core reader'. Those people reading more than one newspaper were asked which one was the most essential to him/her and for this paper he/she was defined a core reader.

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Some of the main questions were asked only about the most essential or important title, while in other questions we tried to compare the most important with the second one.

Types of questions

The questions under review had to be valid for all the dailies and in our first (and so far only) survey they concerned:

- (1) The way of getting the copy in question (subscription, buying, borrowing etc.)
- (2) Time spent reading
- (3) How many years as a reader
- (4) Age of the copy read
- (5) Reading of various typical features
- (6) Evaluation of various qualities attributable to the newspaper eg useful, reliable, humane etc.

Problems of wording

What are, eg 'foreign affairs'? For the investigation we wanted to know who and how many read the columns dealing with foreign policy: interviewers were instructed very clearly in this respect. But at the time when we were having our meetings with the interviewers a typhoon was ravaging the Caribbean Sea and Florida, and the interviewers were told that descriptions of the damages etc. are not 'foreign affairs', whereas the actions governments might take do belong to the category in question. The same problem of definitions will occur with 'domestic matters', 'commercial columns', 'culture' etc.

Judgement of the dailies were obtained through statements, and it became clear that some of the differences between the dailies were to a great extent due to linguistic variations between different groups in a small country rather than to real differences between the various newspapers. I imagine that this problem is even greater in larger countries.

MAIN FINDINGS

All the publishing houses involved received a report containing their own figures, and for comparison the averages for

- (1) all Danish newspapers
- (2) local dailies
- (3) national dailies.

There were no comments in these reports but the publishing houses were offered for a small additional fee another report, picking out the most interesting figures and including an interpretation of them by the Secretary of the DMK (the writer of this paper).

Some of the smaller newspapers accepted the offer and the bigger ones were able themselves to interpret the results, often after some contact with the Secretary. 29 out of 49 editorial staffs paid at least some attention to it — and they are responsible for 83% of the copies sold.

Subsequently I wrote a book containing those results of most interest to the general public and this is now on sale. It was written to be suitable as a text book for social studies among the 15-17 year olds.

TABLE 1
Non-reading among core readers and other readers

Sample size	Core readers 21,715		Other readers 7,291	
	Nothing %	No answer %	Nothing %	No answer %
Foreign politics	16	1	19	9
Domestic politics	7	1	10	9
Local matters	14	2	31	10
Sports	44	2	40	10
Personal	36	2	52	10
Radio/TV progr. etc.	9	1	25	9
Controversy (letters)	21	1	23	9
Culture	40	2	40	10
Trade, economy etc.	29	2	30	9
Consumers' column	23	2	29	9
Classified ads	37	2	47	10

Source: The editorial survey 1978.

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In that book the figures for the national dailies are split into two groups: the two popular tabloid papers and the eight others. The following figures are taken from the book but here the main stress is on facts which need to be taken into account both in media planning and in creative work.

Reading of various features

In **Table 1** a comparison may be made between the reading of the newspaper most important to the interviewee and of the one second in importance.

The question was "Now I mention various features and for each of them I will ask you to estimate how much you regularly read: Most of it — something — nothing or nearly nothing".

The figures in **Table 1** are based on all newspapers. As a general rule one expects the figures for non-reading always to be bigger among other readers than among core readers. The general rule is verified but the differences vary considerably and there is a single exception in the case of sports.

However it is my impression that the variation in differences is mostly due to the fact that the national dailies are found in a greater proportion among other readers than among core readers.

Before the investigation, most editors and researchers thought that where a person in the provinces reads both a local and a national daily he/she feels the local one most important to him/her in daily life. That was not the case: half of the interviewees in this situation preferred the local daily, half the national one.

TABLE 3
Non-reading in national dailies.
Core readers and other readers. Men and women.

	Core readers		Other readers	
	Men	Women	Men	Women
No. of interviews	2,366	2,587	1,785	1,486
	%	%	%	%
Foreign politics	8	12	15	19
Domestic politics	3	5	8	9
Local matters	35	27	44	39
Sports	32	60	29	54
Personal	61	46	63	53
Radio/TV progr.etc.	10	6	27	22
Controversy (letters)	16	12	23	19
Culture	34	25	43	34
Trade, economy etc.	21	38	25	36
Consumers' column	30	23	33	24
Classified ads	55	57	51	54

Source: The editorial survey 1978.

That national dailies are found in a greater proportion among other readers than among core readers is due to the fact that it is more common in the capital than in the provinces to read more than one daily — and there are only very few readers of provincial newspapers in Copenhagen.

In **Table 2**, a comparison is made between the groups of national dailies — the popular and the quality

TABLE 2
Non-reading among core readers of national dailies

Sample size	Quality papers 5,368		Popular papers 3,395	
	Nothing %	No answer %	Nothing %	No answer %
Foreign politics	7	1	15	2
Domestic politics	3	1	7	2
Local matters	29	3	34	5
Sports	53	2	33	2
Personal	44	2	69	3
Radio/TV progr.etc.	9	2	7	2
Controversy (letters)	10	1	20	2
Culture	21	1	43	2
Trade, economy etc.	28	1	31	2
Consumers' column	27	2	26	2
Classified ads	55	2	59	3

Source: The editorial survey 1978.

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ones. There is nothing astonishing in the figures, but the survey has produced figures verifying some general beliefs.

In the debate among editors following the investigation particular interest was expressed in the differences by sex (**Table 3**). The reason is partly discussion about women's liberation, partly the growing surplus of women (especially older women).

Reading time

Both from this research and from two investigations carried out during labour conflicts in 1977 and 1981 we

know that the reading of newspapers plays a greater role in men's lives than in women's. This was further confirmed in this survey, but in a simple tabulation the differences based on sex interact with those based on education, and men have on average a better school education than women. Therefore in **Table 4** the two groups (men and women) have the same school education.

Reading time naturally varies between the most important newspaper and the second one, as shown in **Table 5**.

TABLE 4
Reading time for national dailies.
Core readers and other readers.
Persons with General Certificate etc.

	Core readers		Other readers	
	Men	Women	Men	Women
No. of interviews	553	462	309	189
	%	%	%	%
Less than 15 min	9	13	32	26
15-29 min.	22	28	33	31
30-44 min.	31	26	19	15
45-59 min.	17	15	3	6
1 hour or more	20	17	6	10
Don't know	1	1	7	12

Source: The editorial survey 1978.

The readers' evaluations of their newspapers

As mentioned above, interviewees were also asked to evaluate the newspaper most important to them, using a 'statement' technique. This showed some variations: the smallest ones were by sex, rather bigger ones by urbanization, and biggest by school education (**Table 6**).

The results were also analyzed by age, and showed only minor variations. A single one was, however, clear: the youngest of the adults, 13-24 years, did not find the newspapers entertaining to the same degree as did the older respondents. Furthermore it was often found that poor evaluations among the youngest readers were often found in areas where the two popular tabloid papers had a relatively strong position.

Many figures were issued and many discussions of them took place among editorial staffs, and despite a prohibition by the newspapers' association they were also used for selling advertising space and thence for media planning (there will be no prohibition next time).

TABLE 5
Reading time for most important newspaper and the second one.
National dailies.

	Most important		Second one	
	Quality	Popular	Quality	Popular
No. of interviews	3,136	1,817	1,764	1,507
	%	%	%	%
Less than 15 min.	12	14	29	30
15-29 min.	23	29	30	33
30-44 min.	25	23	16	18
45-59 min.	16	13	7	6
1 hour or more	22	18	9	7
Don't know	2	3	9	6

Source: The editorial survey 1978.

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TABLE 6
Male core readers' evaluations.
Shortest and longest school education.

	Total	<i>among others</i>	
		Shortest	Longest
No. of interviews	2,366	480	553
	%	%	%
Useful	68	60	76
Sensational	28	38	10
Easy to find			
what you want	89	89	88
Good entertainment	55	55	46
Easy to understand	86	83	83
Human	51	43	57
Reliable	36	26	48
Sticks to viewpoint	53	50	56

The figures indicate how many "agree fully".

Source: The editorial survey 1978.

Miscellaneous

Some of the larger national media — dailies as well as magazines have been interested in duplication with foreign media, and for this reason we carried out a small study in November 1982: the figures have just been published. The biggest foreign magazines in Denmark are *Newsweek* and *Time* with coverages of 2.1% and 2.0%. Then follows *Der Spiegel* and *Hörzu*, both with 1.2%

These are small figures but they have doubled within about 10 years. There are great differences between the capital and the provinces, and for *Hörzu* between different parts of Denmark. Even bigger are the variations by education and biggest of all by Danish titles read (magazines, but much more on newspapers). For two quality papers we have found that 10% of their readers read *Time*, and for one of them the same proportion reads *Newsweek*, whereas that magazine reaches 18% of the readers of the other quality paper.