

1.13 The readership survey of the Italian periodical press

INTRODUCTION

In Italy we do not have a multi-media survey, as in Germany, Belgium, the Netherlands or the United Kingdom, for instance, because publishers act separately from other media.

There are two distinct readership surveys of the Italian press: one covering magazines, called Indagine sulla Stampa Periodica in Italia (ISPI), the other on dailies called Indagine Stampa Editori Giornali Italiani (ISEGI).

ISEGI, whose first edition was in 1973, is repeated every two to three years and does not differ basically from the English NRS methodology.

ISPI has much more historical background since the first one was sponsored by advertising agencies in 1958; then in 1963 publishers and advertising agencies repeated it, but only since 1968 it became annual, sponsored always by publishers.

Actually ISPI is most similar to the English NRS, particularly regarding the questioning.

THE SAMPLE

It is a multi-stage probability sample, representative of the adult population over 15 years. The sample size is 18,000 interviews, distributed by geographic regions and size of towns.

The sampling points are 615 communes out of 8140. After a random selection of communes (the towns over 50,000 inhabitants are always included) there is a random selection of names from census bureaux in each sampling point. Only one person per family is interviewed.

There are two survey stages per year, each one of 9000 interviews, in autumn and in spring.

THE QUESTIONNAIRE

Stimulus the interviewer shuffles the individual masthead cards and the informant sorts cards into two groups: read or looked at in a time period; not read or looked at (there is a rotation of publication groups: half sample weeklies/monthlies, other half monthlies/

weeklies).

Time filter question weeklies: read or looked at in last three months at least once, at home or outside the home. Monthlies: read or looked at in the last 12 months, at least once, at home or outside the home.

Frequency question numeric scale, how many issues out of 12.

Recency question – last seven days for weeklies, last 30 days for monthlies.

Provenance of copy.

THE RESULTS

We publish in the report, together with the socio-demographic profile of magazines audience the reading probabilities (B/A) calculated as the ratio between readers in the last period/recency readers (B) and the total readers/filter period (A).

Every year three big volumes are printed and distributed to advertising agencies and advertisers for media planning usage.

It is also possible to access by terminal a time-sharing system in which all media data are stored.

EXPERIMENTS IN VALIDATING AND ADJUSTING THE RECENCY TECHNIQUE

Since 1968 publishers have very much improved the readership survey. Many experiments were conducted by the two main Italian research institutes in charge of ISPI and many were appreciated by users (such as the marketing data on range of products, interest, etc).

A particular mention must be made of questions on the validity of recency methods.

In November/December 1975 and April/May 1976 the research institutes, Doxa and Demoskopea, interviewed 18,000 people over the age of 15 all over Italy, using a questionnaire which had been partially modified with respect to that used in the past, in order to get a more in-depth picture of the reading habits of Italians.

What was learnt from the new survey and what results were obtained?

Let us start from the questions put in the questionnaire. ISPI readers are, by definition, 'recent readers' and more exactly, all those who have "read or glanced through a magazine, at home or elsewhere, in the last

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seven days" preceding the interview (last 30 days for monthlies).

Until last year the interview procedure was as follows: the interviewee was shown cards with the logos of the names, and the interviewer asked which weeklies (or monthlies) from among those known he had read or glanced through in the last three months (or 12 months for monthlies) and, more particularly, how many of the last 12 issues published in that period he had had occasion to look at. He was then asked the last time that he had read one, so as to be able to consider as readers only those persons who had come into contact with the magazine in the last seven days (or 30 for monthlies).

In the second cycle of the 1975 survey another question was included, for experimental purposes: the interviewee was asked to think of the last copy read yesterday, two days ago, three days ago, etc and to say whether that was the first time he had picked up that copy or whether he had already read it or glanced through it on the days before.

This question was introduced with the intention of reducing the number of statements regarding reading of back copies of the magazine and repeated reading of the same issue of the magazine. ISPI 1976 attempted to enhance this concept, with two important changes to the previous questionnaire.

At the beginning of the interview the question on

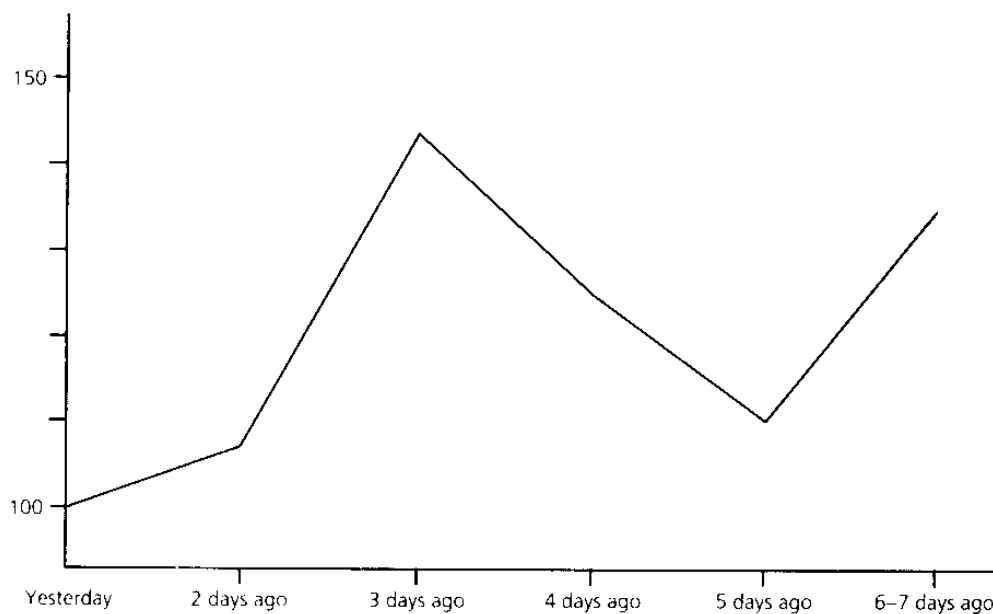
reading over the last three months was put immediately, without asking the interviewee to divide the block of cards into two groups, those read or known and those he had never seen or heard mention of (as had always been done in previous surveys).

The second change concerned recent reading: as well as asking the interviewee the last time he had picked up a copy of the magazine, throughout the seven days prior to the interview, day by day up to the seventh, the interviewer also asked whether this had been the first time he had read or looked through that particular copy of the magazine or not.

The intention was obviously to avoid, or (as far as possible) limit, false statements about reading because the interviewee tends to say, in absolute good faith, what he does usually. The statements he makes are on his reading habits. It is the false statements on reading which continue to be the main difficulty in this readership survey and in all surveys based on the recollections of the interviewee. In the USA and in France too, the most recent readership surveys have given rise to controversies relating not only to methods adopted.

The fiercest criticism is made when a different estimated number of readers is obtained for dailies with the same copy circulations. Even though, in theory, it is admitted that publications with the same circulation may have a varying number of readers per copy, nearly always

FIGURE 1
Non-repetitive readers (by day of the week)



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the publisher concerned will not accept that his paper can, for example, have one third less readers than his competitor's paper.

But let us get back to the Italian situation. With the new questions we wanted to return to a reliable recollection of the act of reading. Our objective was to check the type of information obtained by stimulating recollection of most recent reading. The interviewee – we told ourselves – should find it easier to recall what he read yesterday and two days ago, rather than what he had read six or seven days ago.

WHAT RESULTS DID WE OBTAIN?

The examination of the questionnaires for the first cycle of interviews (about 9000) showed us that the replies did not back up our theories. As the interviews had been spread over the space of a week we expected – if not a number of reading statements which was more or less the same for the different days of the week – at least a decreasing number of readers as we went further back in time from the day of the interview. But it was not so.

For weeklies, for example, the type of curve shown

in **Figure 1** is obtained for persons and their non-repeated reading by day of the week (in other words, those who picked up the magazine yesterday for the first time, those who did so two days ago for the first time, three days ago, etc): yesterday 100, two days ago 105, three days ago 144, four days ago 125, five days ago 109, rising to 134 for six to seven days ago.

This curve is obtained by adding together the non-repetitive readers, by day of the week, for 22 weeklies.

The strange thing is the rise in readers on the third/fourth day. There are publications which accumulate readers up to the fourth day before the interview, with a fall-off on the fifth and a recovery on the sixth/seventh day (see **Table 1**). This therefore means that there is something out-of-line in the way that memory works. It would have been more natural to expect a similar trend to that for magazines M and Z, rather than that described above. No one single conclusion can therefore be drawn from this information, nor is it possible to limit the estimate for readers of the last week just to the statements made yesterday, because the number of replies does not provide an adequate base for each subsequent analysis on the profile of readers. To get round this problem, the sample would have to be greatly enlarged and

TABLE 1
ISPI 1976 – First cycle: experimental processing
Non-repetitive readers (first time, by day): yesterday = 100

Publications	Yesterday	2 days ago	3 days ago	4 days ago	5 days ago	6-7 days ago
A	100	108	177	147	135	163
B	100	151	255	173	181	227
C	100	112	168	173	107	191
D	100	97	104	78	70	77
E	100	128	206	114	134	144
F	100	72	105	104	82	92
G	100	117	124	105	102	115
H	100	97	125	91	101	83
I	100	121	122	136	118	164
L	100	103	134	104	93	118
M	100	102	98	90	84	120
N	100	136	244	183	152	226
O	100	121	137	136	130	188
P	100	75	120	76	51	62
Q	100	113	156	146	99	133
R	100	125	132	137	97	134
S	100	82	167	104	131	123
T	100	100	138	129	134	120
U	100	61	122	131	106	123
V	100	94	119	113	98	116
W	100	86	119	133	103	137
Z	100	101	91	93	85	93
Total	100	105	144	125	109	134

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the less important publications obliged to withdraw from this survey.

All things considered, the traditional readership statement, referred to the last seven days, comes closest to reality. An examination of the data for the first cycle shows that, between the non-repetitive readers of the last seven days and the traditional recent readers, there is a very small percentage difference, which is due to repeated reading.

As this percentage is small and more or less the same for all magazines, it does not lead to serious distortions. In addition, the fact that the first filter (division of

magazines into known and not-known) has been eliminated, to concentrate immediately on the magazines read, the interviewee is helped to remember only the magazines with which he has more 'habitual' contact.

It is clear that, so long as we take as our base statements referring to recent reading, these cannot coincide with the number of readers of an average issue; we know, however - from this year's experience - that by going beyond a certain limit of meticulousness in the replies, we are moving too far in the opposite direction, but without gaining the certainty of having obtained the right result.