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THE EXTENDED MEDIA LIST - GROUPED TITLES, NO MASTHEADS

INTRODUCTION

In this contribution I should like to isolate one particular design aspect of the new EML (Extended Media List) grouped titles technique, which is in use for the UK National Reader Survey since January 1984, and try to give an answer to the often heard question as to why the EML cards employ typescript names of publications instead of mastheads. I should also like to discuss other relevant issues to do with the EML card design.

Looking back at history, mastheads as a recall aid in readership research have been the subject of discussion and of experiments from time to time, particularly on the Continent. When, say in the late 50's and early 60's, media researchers decided to use masthead cards in preference to typescript titles for their readership surveys they did so because mastheads were in general found to be superior as recall aids, especially amongst low frequency readers of the publications concerned (Metzger, 1972), and also because they were found to perform differently amongst demographic sub-groups of the population (Bennike, 1982). On the other hand, there was some evidence that publications with a relative 'strong' title or 'strong' masthead design attracted higher claims by respondents in recall tests than did those with relative 'weak' titles or 'weak' masthead designs thus introducing, within a survey, potential biases between titles (Hofstätter, 1972). Concerning the question whether mastheads should be multicoloured or black and white, recent evidence seems to show that it does not generally make a difference for survey results which is used (Tennstädt, 1984).

However, recall aids are only one element of a survey's design; and sources of possible errors underlying readership results can only with great difficulty be attributed to the design of recall aids alone. There are

normally other design aspects which have far greater effects on a survey's results.

In the following, I should nevertheless like to focus on the EML publication cards because they represent a departure from current survey practices in most countries, and, we feel, are crucially important for the success of the new method now in use in the UK. I should like to reflect briefly on the reasons why titles are grouped, why they are not headed, the importance of standardising and restricting the number of titles on the card, why typed-out titles instead of mastheads are used, then to present the results of an analysis showing the effects of different positions of titles on the card and finally to present the results of an experiment in which, at the end of the standard NRS interview, respondents were asked additional readership questions for five women's weekly reproductions of their covers.

GROUPED TITLES

The most obvious objective of developing the new technique was to add a considerable number of titles to the media list. Instead of the maximum 110-120 titles covered hitherto under the old single title card methodology, the National Readership Survey is now able to measure about 200 titles in a single interview within the same basic interview length as before. At the same time, known problems of the old masthead technique were to be reduced, like rotation and title confusion effects.

For example, general monthly magazines which suffered rotation effects most under the old method, were shown in 1983 to have a gross Average Issue Readership of 38% higher when they appeared early in the masthead booklet than when they appeared late, and women's monthlies were shown to have a gross readership of 29% higher when

shown early rather than late. Title confusion was demonstrated by the fact that, for instance, of the title pair *Homes and Gardens* and *House and Garden* there was a discrepancy factor of 95% according to whether *Homes & Gardens* preceded *House and Garden*, and vice versa, in the interview. The way of achieving a reduction of these effects was, amongst others, principally by means of grouping titles on cards, as shown in Figure 1.

FIGURE 1

			1
The Sun		The Guardian	
	The Times		
Daily Mail		Daily Star	
			a

From the beginning of 1984, informants were presented 37 cards each listing up to seven titles.* They were asked to sort these cards into two piles, those which contained at least one title read or looked at for at least two minutes in the past year, and those cards which did not contain a title they had seen. There is a procedure for checking 'not sure' cards and of re-checking 'no' cards. At this very first stage of the interview, the informant does not name individual titles on the card. (The naming of individual titles will be part of the second and third stages, the asking of frequency and recency questions, asked of 'yes' cards only.) At this first stage there is therefore the speedy discarding of cards containing titles not relevant to the informant. But in order to reduce the risk of discarding cards wrongly, the cards were specifically designed as to maximise the informant's perception of

each title on each card. I will describe next how we attempted to achieve this.

CARDS ARE NOT HEADED

Informants, presented with the task of sorting the 37 or more cards, are encouraged to sort them at their own pace. Some do it fast, others more slowly. This takes care of the fact that people perceive the written word, and, as is the case here, words which are put together in a certain way, differently as far as speed and efficiency are concerned. In addition, there is what is called, in psychological terms, analytic and synthetic perception: with the analytic method of perceiving, each detail - or single word of a group of words - is studied separately by the reader/informant; with the synthetic method of perceiving the reader/informant tends to perceive the group of words as a whole without too great attention to each detail or single word. With the grouped titles method the analytic perceiver is encouraged to be in a way more synthetic - say, in the interest of speed, and the synthetic perceiver to be more analytic - this in the interest of accuracy.

It is therefore an important feature of the cards that there are no descriptive headings. If there were headings, there would be greater risk of discarding cards wrongly by, say, the synthetic perceiver who might read the heading only and does not pay attention to perhaps the sole title he might have seen. Because of this absence of headings, we hypothesise that there is also relatively little risk of losing readership claims for titles which cannot be clearly categorised to one group of titles or the other, thus forming 'mixed' or less coherent groups.

Possible card categorisation errors were, amongst others, the subject of a special investigation during 1984. The results showed that there were no

* In 1985, there are 42 cards, each with normally five or six titles.

noticeable effects on the readership claims for titles which were in the experiments subjected to swaps from one more or less suitable card to another more or less suitable card, as demonstrated by the fact that there was a difference of only 2% between the gross Average Issue Readerships of eight titles when they were moved to different cards between the first and second quarter of that year, with part of that difference probably due to seasonality.

THE NUMBER OF TITLES ON THE CARD IS RESTRICTED

Following the above line of reasoning, namely that on the one hand the grouped titles card should, if possible, be perceived as a whole but that on the other hand each title should be perceived separately it becomes clear that the number of titles on a given card must be restricted. During 1984 the standard number of titles on a card varied between four and seven; for certain periods, there were some cards with two or three titles in operation.

The experiments of 1984 testing the effect of different numbers of titles on a card showed that card length could indeed be a factor affecting readership claims. There were four cards selected for the experiment - for the first the number of titles was reduced from five to four, for the second the number of titles was reduced from six to five, for the third the number was increased from three to four, and for the fourth the number was increased from five to six. Based on gross Average Issue Readership results the overall finding was that shorter cards tend to produce higher readership estimates by an average amount of 6%. (The range was 1% to 31%, but the card which produced the highest effect was excluded from the average because we felt that much of the cause for the difference could have been the fact that a very prominent title was shifted, causing informants not to select the card at all when that particular title was

absent and thus reducing readership of the remaining titles on the card. Though this was our hypothesis at the time, we also know by now that this particular hypothesis is not necessarily supported in other similar cases).

Faced with this evidence it was decided to standardise the number of titles on each card to five or six. This was implemented for the 1985 survey.

TYPESCRIPT TITLES INSTEAD OF MASTHEADS

On the questions whether mini-mastheads or typed-out titles are to be preferred, the conclusions drawn following experiments with the Danish Discs and reported by Sigurd Bennike at New Orleans in 1981, were taken on board.

They read:

"We concluded that some mastheads provide a *good* prompt and some a *bad one*, in relation to certain demographic criteria and that it is therefore most fair to use common typography, when several titles are shown together, so that good ones will not *steal* anything from the bad ones." (Bennike, 1982).

If the aim is to ensure that each title presented on the grouped titles card should have the same chance to come to the informant's attention, masthead representation can unfairly enhance or diminish that chance when titles are viewed together. Potentially confusable titles, when shown simultaneously, are taking their meaning from that juxtaposition and we came to the conclusion that there is little additional value from masthead representation. The fact that there is strong evidence of reduced title confusion effects with the grouped titles method leads us to believe that typescript titles are probably the better method than grouped mastheads, and a fairer one overall, though of course this does not exclude that further experimental work might point

to, perhaps, mixed representations of titles.

TITLE POSITION

As part of the EML Experiment conducted in May 1983, we tested whether there were 'within card order effects' - that is whether there was any tendency for titles in a particularly favourable position on a card to outscore titles in less favourable positions. It was hypothesised that the 'top left' position was probably the best compared with other positions. It was found that titles in that position achieved higher levels of claims for 'past year' readership than when they were in other positions of between 5% and 10%, but that this effect was not carried through into AIR claims. (Allt, 1983)

Prior to implementing the new method fully in January 1984, further analysis showed that for cards containing five titles arranged as in the example below, the 'best' position was the centre position, and the 'worst' the bottom right position, while for cards containing six titles the 'best' position was as hypothesised earlier, the 'top left'. The two layout rotations of titles on the card implemented for 1984, took this into account, as follows:

For five title cards the standard layouts were:

Layout I			Layout II		
1	2		4	1	
	3			5	
4		5	2		3

For six title cards the standard layouts were:

Layout I			Layout II		
1	2		6	5	
3		4	4		3
5		6	2		1

The tables below summarise the results of an analysis undertaken on 1984 full survey data, measuring the effects of different positions on those cards which employed the above layouts.

Looking first at five title cards, the findings of the May 1983 experiment appear confirmed. Top left, top right and bottom left positions perform equally well. In particular, there is no suggestion from the findings that the bottom left position performs worse than any of the other two.

Comparison of pairs of positions

Five title cards*

Pair number	Gross Average Issue Readership	
	Adults %	Women %
(1) I top left	37.7	35.1
II top right	<u>37.8</u>	<u>35.7</u>
I divided by II	0.99	0.98
(2) I top right	12.6	13.9
II bottom left	<u>12.3</u>	<u>14.1</u>
I divided by II	1.02	0.99
(3) I centre	14.3	17.0
II bottom right	<u>12.4</u>	<u>15.0</u>
I divided by II	1.15	1.13
(4) I bottom left	23.0	26.3
II top left	<u>21.3</u>	<u>24.8</u>
I divided by II	1.08	1.06
(5) I bottom right	25.1	31.5
II centre	<u>23.7</u>	<u>28.6</u>
I divided by II	1.06	1.10
I Total	112.6	123.8
II Total	<u>108.6</u>	<u>118.2</u>
I divided by II	1.04	1.05

* Eight cards during January to March and October to December 1984.
Nine cards during April to September 1984

Comparison of pairs of positions

Six title cards*

Pair number	Gross Average Issue Readership	
	Adults %	Women %
(1) I top left	24.8	21.5
II bottom right	<u>23.7</u>	<u>20.2</u>
I divided by II	1.05	1.06
(2) I top right	10.6	8.5
II bottom left	<u>11.5</u>	<u>10.1</u>
I divided by II	0.92	0.84
(3) I centre left	16.4	16.0
II centre right	<u>16.6</u>	<u>15.9</u>
I divided by II	0.99	1.01
(4) I centre right	10.7	7.9
II centre left	<u>10.9</u>	<u>8.4</u>
I divided by II	0.98	0.94
(5) I bottom left	44.4	44.3
II top right	<u>47.0</u>	<u>45.0</u>
I divided by II	0.94	0.98
(6) I bottom right	44.7	44.0
II top left	<u>46.0</u>	<u>43.6</u>
I divided by II	0.97	1.01
I Total	151.6	142.2
II Total	<u>155.7</u>	<u>143.2</u>
I divided by II	1.03	0.99

* Eight cards during January to March
and July to September 1984.
Nine cards during April to June and
October to December 1984

Of the two comparisons of centre versus bottom right positions, the first comparison (number 3) shows the centre position to be performing better than the bottom right position, while the second comparison (number 5) shows the bottom right position to be better performing than the centre position, but the net results seem to indicate that there is a very slight disadvantage for a title to be in the

bottom right position rather than in the centre.

Turning to the six title cards, where each pair comparison can be made twice (eg pair numbers 1 and 6, 2 and 5, 3 and 4), the net effects again seem to confirm broadly the experiment findings, namely that the bottom right position performs less well than the top left position, but that there is very little overall difference between the other pairs of positions.

Among women, there are only minor variations to these patterns, again indicating to us some position effects but no series deficiencies in the way titles are positioned on the cards.

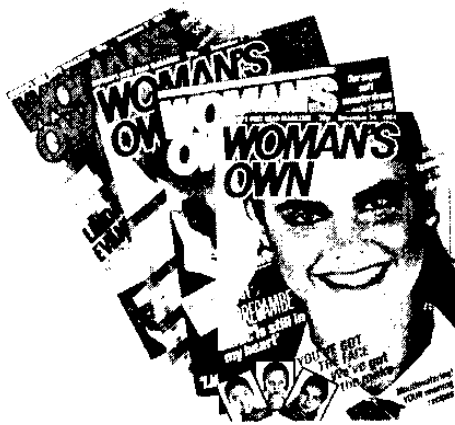
By continuing with the rotation of positions of titles on a card, we hope to have found a fair measure of counter-balancing the detected disadvantages of some positions.

EXPERIMENTS WITH MASTHEADS AND COVER REPRODUCTION

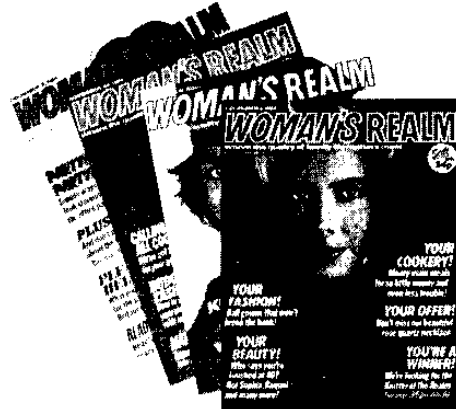
During the January to April 1985 fieldwork period, an experiment was undertaken, using the standard NRS interview, to measure the effect of showing women respondents at the end of the interview in addition either mastheads or black and white cover reproductions of five women's weekly publications. The titles were *Woman's Own*, *Woman*, *Woman's Weekly*, *Woman's Realm*, and *My Weekly*. The question was whether mastheads or cover reproductions would help informants recognise the publications concerned better than the typescript names on the EML grouped titles card.

In detail, after the standard NRS interview was completed half the sample of women were shown a card with the mastheads of the magazines displayed on blank squares (Figure 2), and the other half black and white front covers of the magazines arranged in fans (Figure 3). Respondents were asked to say

FIGURE 2



Woman's Own



Woman's Realm



Woman

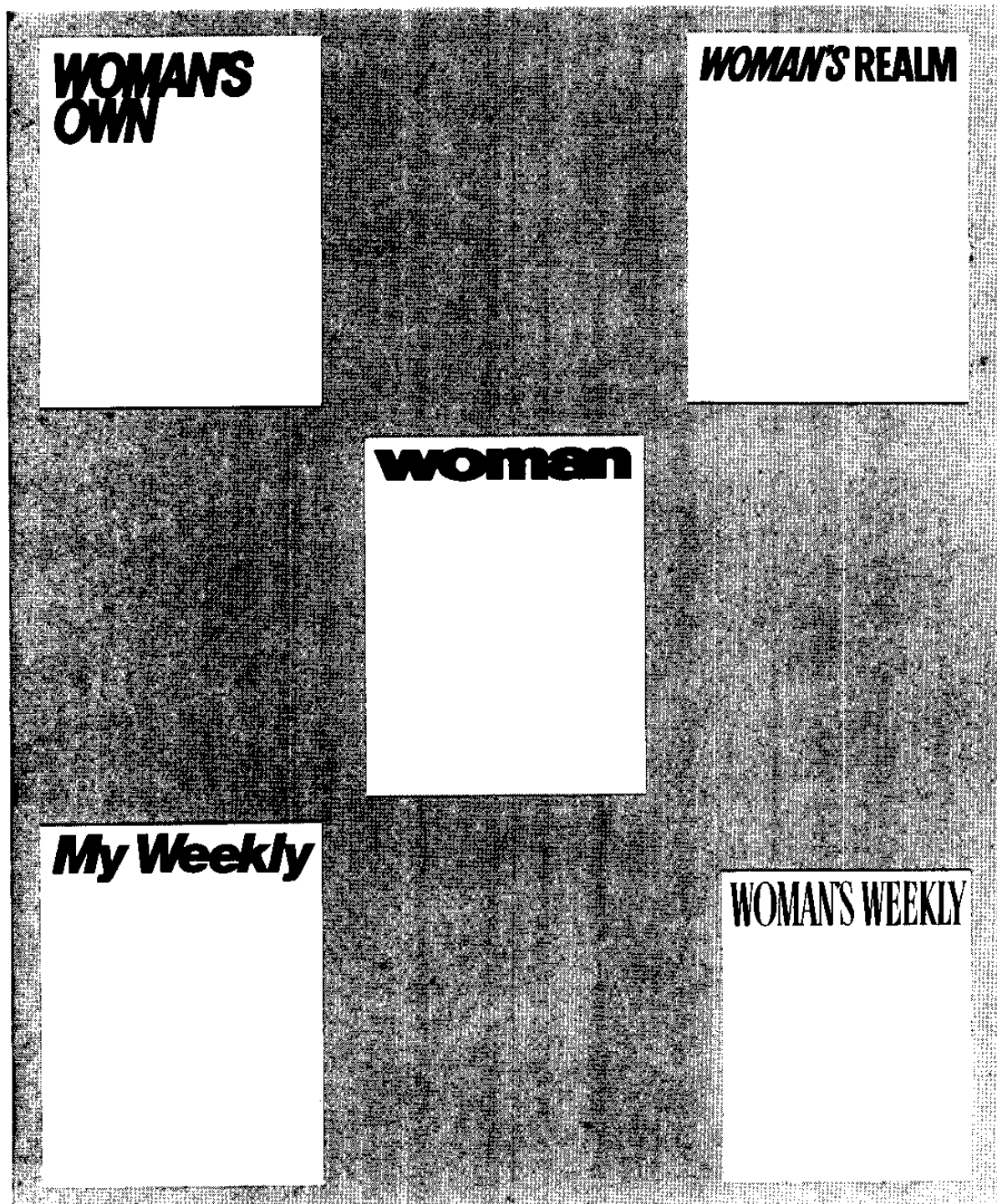


My Weekly



Woman's Weekly

FIGURE 3



which of these magazines they had 'read or looked at for at least two minutes on or since last ...day' (ie seven days ago). It was made clear that not the particular issues shown on the card were asked about. The pictures on the card were there 'just to show what the front covers can look like'. There were two layouts of each card matching the layouts I and II of the standard EML card.

The results of this investigation (Rothman, 1985) showed that in 95% of cases women did not change their answers when shown the masthead or photograph stimuli compared with their answers given to the typescript EML card, as summarised in the following table. Where they did change their answers, the conclusion drawn was that it was not as much title confusion rather than confusion of time. That is to say it was confusion about the recency of their reading which resulted in a different answer when shown a different stimulus at the end of the interview. This was concluded, because there was very little switching from one title to another between the standard EML interview and the experiment question at the end of the interview. Rather, in 81% of cases of inconsistency, respondents switched from claiming no title at all at the standard question to claiming one or more at the experiment question, or vice versa. This suggested to us that time confusion was a more likely cause than title confusion, and that a second prompt regardless in which form it is presented, produces such differences.

Similar experiments with masthead and photographic stimuli continued throughout 1985, for other women's magazines and for other possible confusable titles like motoring magazines. We also decided to test further whether informants give indeed different answers at the end of the interview, even if the same stimulus is employed, by using the EML card again for one half, and either a masthead or cover reproduction card for the other half of respondents.

	All claims (Women)		
	Total %	Mast head experiment %	Cover reproduction experiment %
Positive claim at both questions (standard EML and experiment)	12.4	11.8	12.9
Negative claim at both questions	<u>82.2</u>	<u>82.9</u>	<u>81.4</u>
Consistent claims	94.5	94.7	94.3
Positive claim at standard EML, but negative claim at experiment	2.3	2.1	2.5
Negative claim at standard EML, but positive claim at experiment	<u>3.2</u>	<u>3.2</u>	<u>3.1</u>
	100.0	100.0	100.0

We hope to be able to report results of these tests early in 1986.

CONCLUSION

In the implementation of the new design of the UK National Readership Survey which involved the grouping of titles on cards, various factors needed to be considered, of which some were briefly discussed in this contribution. One of them in particular was whether mastheads or typescript titles were to be preferred. I hope to have shown that it was a logical step to decide on typescript titles rather than mastheads once titles were to be grouped in the way and with the objectives as described. This was in the context of a readership survey of the general population. For readership surveys amongst special sub-groups of the population involving specialist

publications (for instance amongst professions such as doctors or accountants) other considerations might apply leading to different solutions.

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