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MAGAZINE ISSUE AGE IN PUBLIC PLACES

In obtaining average issue audience estimates the reader recognition or Through-the-Book method normally utilises five week old weekly and 10 to 12 week old monthly magazines. This study partially addresses the question of whether or not there are likely to be new readers of magazines after the age at which they are normally tested. It deals only with issue age in public places not in individual homes nor private places such as at people's places of work.

In the United States, public place reading appears to contribute materially to total average issue audiences. SMRB and MRI report on reading which occurs other than at home, at work, or while travelling. The bulk of this reading is public place reading. According to SMRB, for the top twenty magazines in terms of circulation, such reading occurs for 20.9% of all issues read. The MRI level reading is 25.5%.

The question is: Is there likely to be substantial reading in public places which is missed because of issue age? If substantial numbers of magazine issues in public places are older than the age at which they are tested for readership, one can assume that a non-trivial amount of reading of such issues is distinctly possible if not probable.

It must be stressed that the concern here is with first-time readers. We are not concerned with people who read an issue before the five week or 10 to 12 week cut-off points and then read it again subsequently. Presumably these readers would be captured by the aged issues that are used in the standard Through-the-Book procedure.

The data being presented are based on the actual inventory of all magazine issues found in a probability sample of 1,215 establishments which:

(1) Are accessible to the public

(2) Have a waiting room or sitting area

(3) Have an inventory of one or more magazine issues available to the public using the waiting room or sitting area.

The study was conducted in 1984 by Audits & Surveys in two major metropolitan areas, Chicago and Los Angeles. The geographic universe in each city included those zip codes which contained households of average or higher income and/or up-scale business districts. The geographic universe included 81% of the establishments of the 101,000 establishments in both ADI's.

In each metropolitan area, all five digit zip codes were classified as falling in or out of the specified universe. Those falling in the universe comprised the sampling frame. The sample was selected with probability proportionate to the number of relevant establishments in each zip code. The type of establishments which have waiting rooms or sitting areas for clients, patients or other publics include:

Barber shops
Beauty parlours
Dentists' offices
Doctors' offices
Lawyers' offices
Accountants' offices
Engineers' offices
Miscellaneous business offices

Within each selected zip code area, individual establishments were selected at random from a list of business establishments.

As will become apparent, these establishments carry a large inventory of consumer magazines, both weeklies and monthlies, and many of these magazines are not the most recent issues.

The actual data base for the results which follow include:

1,215 establishments which had a total of
11,192 issues of weekly/bi-weekly
magazines and
20,315 issues of monthly magazines.

The average magazine inventory per establishment was roughly the same in the two markets - 26.5 in Chicago versus 22.0 in Los Angeles.

Similarly the number of different titles per establishments was comparable: 6.4 in Chicago versus 6.0 in Los Angeles. And the percent of issues which were weeklies versus monthlies was identical: Weeklies comprised 38% of magazine inventories in both Chicago and Los Angeles.

	Chicago	Los Angeles
Average number of magazine issues per establishment	26.5	22.0
Average number of magazine titles per establishment	6.4	6.0
Weeklies share of magazine inventories	38%	38%
Monthlies share of magazine inventories	62%	62%

Across a total of six major weekly magazine titles, 61% were six weeks old or older. First-time readers of these copies could not be captured by the Through-the-Book method. For monthlies the picture is equally if not more severe. 64% of all issues of monthly magazines were 13 weeks or older. The results for Chicago and Los Angeles do not differ materially.

	% Over-age issues		
	Chicago	Los Angeles	Total
% weeklies over 6 weeks or older	63	59	61
% monthlies over 13 weeks or older	64	64	64

These findings vary by type of establishment, but in all instances a very substantial portion of magazine issues are aged to such a degree that first-time readers of them have no legitimate chance of being included in average issue audience estimates.

	% Over-age issues	
	Weeklies %	Monthlies %
Barber shops	67	72
Beauty shops	65	61
Dentists' offices	48	60
Doctors' offices	62	65
Lawyers' offices	63	66
Other businesses	65	64

In many establishments there is a mix of copies such that some are newer and some older than the age at which they are used for measurement. However, in many establishments the only issues of a given title are over-aged. For the average weekly 33% of the establishments carrying a specific title only have copies of that title which are beyond the age at which they are measured. For the average monthly the level of establishments having only over-aged issues is 44%. Clearly all first-time reading of these titles in these establishments is not captured by the usual recognition technique.

A further analysis was made to determine whether or not the overall results varied for establishments differentiated by their total amount of traffic and waiting time. For this analysis we obtained an estimate of the average number of people who use each waiting room or sitting area per day. We also obtained an estimate of the average amount of time spent per person in each such area. We then assumed that opportunity to read magazines in a public place is related to total people traffic times average amount of time spent.

Using this method of estimating opportunity to read we sorted all establishments into three groups: those

with high versus medium versus low total waiting time. This analysis did not uncover any systematic differences in issue aging.

	% Over age issues	
	<i>Weeklies</i> %	<i>Monthlies</i> %
Establishments with total waiting time values that are:		
High	62	60
Medium	55	61
Low	65	70

Clearly the results of this study cannot be used to estimate the ages of magazine issues in public places across the United States. These two markets may deviate significantly from national levels and issue age may vary by economic area within markets. However, the individual importance of these two areas (they include 9% of the US population), combined with both the magnitude and consistency of results,

forces one to conclude that there is a non-trivial amount of first-time reading of over-age issues.

Whether such first-time reading of over-age issues occurs with greater or less frequency for weeklies versus monthlies is an important question. The answer to this question would not only help estimate the magnitude of issue age in contributing to an understatement of audience size - it will also determine whether these underestimates generally help weeklies more than monthlies or monthlies more than weeklies.

If the fates were kind - which they appear not to be - the understatement would be dealt out evenly across publication interval and magazine type. If the fates were even kinder, this and other sources of audience underestimates would be counter balanced by all sources of audience over-estimates.

Of course such a finding would make another week-long readership conference unnecessary.