Constantino Jannacone
ERCOM Srl, Italy

2.2 READERSHIP RESEARCH AND USERS' NEEDS IN THE ITALIAN MEDIA SITUATION

SUMMARY

Readership research in Italy is probably at a turning point, an answer to the recent requests of the advertising world will come soon.

The purpose of this paper is to present an update on the current situation of readership surveys in Italy and to describe the lines of development being studied by technical committees composed of publishers, advertisers and advertising agencies.

The ongoing debate is replete with innovative proposals and marks the first time publishers have worked together with advertisers and agencies.

Interest in readership surveys has grown in the past few years, due to the increasingly keen competition between the print media and commercial television in selling advertising space.

Whereas in the early '80s print publishers operated in a purely defensive manner, now that they have been faced with the inertia of commercial TV for the past two years, they seem to have discovered new vitality.

This paper will cover the following points:

– the current situation of the print media, following the boom of commercial TV.

– what advertisers and advertising agencies want from the readership surveys: not just the readership of an average issue, but the readership of each, single issue.

– the response of newspaper and magazine publishers. Until now the readership surveys for newspapers (ISEGIPRESS) and for magazines (ISPIPRESS) have been conducted separately. Now a project is under way to conduct a unified print media survey, in view of a soon-to-be established new body for managing the surveys of the '90s with greater involvement of advertisers and ad agencies.

WHAT'S NEW IN ITALY SINCE THE LAST SYMPOSIUM IN SALZBURG?

Three developments have altered the media situation, thereby provoking the debate regarding readership surveys:

(a) The further increase of advertising on commercial TV, and the resulting excessive advertising clutter.

(b) The availability and use of TV audience data by AUDITEL.

(c) The turnabout of advertising spending in the print media, and the birth of newspaper supplements.

For those unaware of past or current events in Italy, a brief background history is necessary.

For more than 20 years after World War II, the development of advertising media was characterised by the undisputed predominance of the print media, especially magazines. Towards the end of the Seventies private commercial television appeared on the scene, and experienced rapid development in terms of acquisition of advertising revenues, due to the fact that space on the state/public networks was limited by law and unable to satisfy the demands of advertisers.

Thanks to the new media, advertising investments have progressively increased to the point that they now represent 0.64% of GNP and 1.00% of household consumption (Table 1).

It must be noted, however, that the increase in advertising expenditures has been mostly in favour of TV, which has enjoyed (a yearly increase in share which in 1985 reached approximately 50% of total spending (Table 2).

In the past two years, however, the print media – newspapers in particular – have made a slight recovery versus television. In fact 1986 and 1987, many advertisers increased spending in print vehicles, in spite of television's lower cost per thousand. Advertisers were also fed up with the excessive number of commercials on the private networks, although an agreement between the advertising associations and Fininvest, the largest private television company with three networks, limits advertising to 16% of each broadcast hour, (this limit is often largely exceeded, especially during prime time).

On the wave of this renaissance in the print market, last year publishers launched several

Table 1

Advertising expenditures – GNP – household expenditures (Billion lire – current prices)

	GNP (A)	Household expenditure (B)	Advertising expenditure (C)	C/A %	C/B %
1980	390,432	244,126	1245	0.32	0.51
1981	468,049	291,647	1522	0.32	0.52
1982	545,124	341,497	1949	0.36	0.57
1983	631,575	395,056	2529	0.40	0.64
1984	720,682	449,763	3132	0.43	0.70
1985	805,754	504,927	3839	0.48	0.76
1986	894,362	553,104	4732	0.53	0.85
1987	970,382	002,000	5677	0.58	0.94
1988 *	1,044,132	662,500	6650	0.64	1.00

* Estimate

Table 2

Market shares by medium

Media:	1988*	1987	1986	1985	1984	1983	1982	1981	1980
Dailies	22.2	22.2	22.5	22.4	23.1	24.9	26.2	28.6	28.8
Magazines	19.5	20.4	20.1	19.3	19.8	22.1	25.7	27.6	28.8
Television	49.7	48.5	48.6	49.2	46.9	41.5	35.7	29.8	26.7
Radio	3.4	3.5	3.6	3.8	4.1	4.9	5.4	6.2	6.9
Outdoor	5.0	5.1	5.0	5.2	5.7	5.9	6.2	6.6	6.8
Cinema	0.2	0.3	0.3	0.2	0.3	0.6	0.9	1.3	1.9
Total (Billion lire)	6,650	5,677	4,732	3,839	3,134	2,529	1,949	1,522	1,245

* Estimate (June '88).

new publications, colour newspaper supplements among them.

Only three newspaper supplements (two weeklies and one monthly) exist to date, sold at news-stands together with their 'mother' newspapers at a slight surcharge. *Sette* is the weekly supplement to the *Corriere della Sera* on Saturdays, *Il Venerdi* is *Repubblica's* weekly supplement on Fridays, and *Magazine* is the monthly supplement to the three regional newspapers published by the Monti Group. The battle of the numbers – print readership vs TV audience – has begun.

ADVERTISERS CONTEST THE METHODOLOGY OF CURRENT READERSHIP SURVEYS

Given the huge mass of TV audience figures provided by the 'people meters' in Auditel's panel and furnished daily to media planners in 1987 advertisers and advertising agencies began asking the print media to provide more frequent and up-dated readership figures (currently, ISEGIPRESS for newspapers and ISPIPRESS for magazines are each conducted and published twice yearly).

The request to revise the methodology of the readership surveys has become pressing on the part of UPA (the Italian Association of Advertisers), which has raised doubts concerning the number of readers-per-copy of newspapers or magazines. Basically the advertisers' argument goes like this: for years the publishers have estimated the number of readers with the same method – Recent Reading but the proportion readers/circulation remains too high.

Auditel, on the other hand, is capable of furnishing minute by minute and day by day data which according to advertisers and advertising agencies are very close to the actual numbers of TV viewers watching a specific programme or commercial.

The number of readers estimated in the readership surveys is based on declarations of average behaviour applied to an average issue of a given publication; these data are available every six months and, therefore, are averaged out over too long a period, in the advertisers' opinion.

What they want are figures more reflective of variations in circulation in the short run. The methodology followed to date, they believe, should be changed.

The credibility of the two surveys ISEGIPRESS and ISPIPRESS suffers when variations in circulations figures are not followed by proportional variations in the numbers of readers. The ratio between number of copies sold and number of readers remains unresolved and difficult to explain.

But the technical explanations are worth little or nothing given that the electronic media have accustomed advertisers to planning and buying advertising space on a day-to-day basis.

THE PUBLISHERS' REACTION TO REQUESTS TO CHANGE METHODOLOGY

The changed media scene has caused competition to become extremely heated: the chase for advertising budgets is pitiless. The TV media spare no blows to the print media in their pricing policies: the cost per thousand of television is too low, and only recently is it beginning to approach that of print. As a result, it becomes especially important to demonstrate to media planners that print vehicles have competitive advertising costs, because they reach a public which is not only quantitatively and qualitatively important but also more segmented among different consumer targets.

In readership research, therefore, it is vital that publishers miss no reader contact whatsoever with each publication, and pick up everyone who has even a small probability of exposure to the advertising pages of the vehicle.

And so for the past 20 years – that is, since Italian publishers have managed and financed the readership surveys (first magazines with ISPIPRESS, then newspapers by ISEGIPRESS) – the Recent Reading method has always been used to obtain readership estimates. Certainly, there have been changes and experiments (see the papers by Jannacone and Denon at the New Orleans symposium) in the application of the filter questions, the frequency scales, the source of the copy, etc, but the definition of 'reader' has remained substantially, the same: "anyone who has read or leafed through, at home or out of the home, at least one issue, any issue, of the publication, during the last publication interval (past day for newspapers, past week for weekly magazines, past month for monthly magazines, etc)."

In addition, in 1984 the MPX method was introduced to estimate the average number of exposures per average page, thereby furnishing a further qualitative criterion of the advertising value of print vehicles.

TOWARDS A SINGLE SURVEY OF NEWSPAPERS AND MAGAZINES

The event which furthered the rapprochement between newspaper and magazine publishers was the launch of newspapers supplements and the need to provide readership figures for these new publications. Last Spring the decision was made to obtain these data by combining the two samples of the two surveys ISPIPRESS and ISEGIPRESS (Figure 1).

From the results obtained, still being studied by the Technical Committees, the publishers hope

Figure 1

Merging of ISPI + ISEGI 1988/9

ISPI (Magazines) 12,000 interviews			ISEGI (Dailies) 13,000 interviews
6,000 weeklies	6,000 monthlies	Duplication of reading	dailes
monthlies	weeklies		weeklies and monthlies
Life style items			none
dailies, supplements		Summing up 25,000 interviews	dailies, supplements

Two steps
- supplements vs dailes and magazines (published in September 1988)
- magazines vs dailes (for Technical Committee)

to resolve a series of doubts regarding the possibilities of merging the two surveys – in particular the results of duplicated reading of newspapers and magazines obtained in a single unified sample.

In the meantime, several tests are under way to provide understanding of how to unify the questionnaires of the two surveys and how to manage the large number of publications and, therefore, of stimulus materials for the face to face interview.

This experiment, in particular, assumes that a single questionnaire will be used for newspapers, newspaper supplements, weekly, bi-weekly and monthly magazines, and that, as opposed to individual stimulus cards with the logo of each publication (as used so far in ISPIPRESS and ISEGIPRESS) large cards, with four to six publications grouped together by category, will be used instead. These tests are necessary primarily to reassure publishers who fear that the relative importance or weight of newspapers and magazines could be upset by a survey with a single questionnaire covering approximately 200 publications (currently 52 newspapers and three supplements in ISEGIPRESS; 42 weekly, two bi-weekly and 75 monthly magazines in ISPIPRESS).

But these tests are also necessary before agreement can be reached concerning the establishment of a new body for managing the new readership surveys of the Nineties, as demanded by advertisers and advertising agencies.

Talks are already underway between FIEG (the Federation of Italian Newspaper and Magazine Publishers), UPA (the Italian Association of Advertisers) and ASSAP (the Italian Association of Advertising Agencies) regarding the formulation of a tripartite organisation. The structure and characteristics of this projected body are still not defined. Advertisers and agencies, however, hope for the adoption of new methods capable of furnishing on an ongoing basis the number of readers issue per actual issue, and not just the number of readers of an average issue.

THE FUTURE ORDER OF READERSHIP RESEARCH IN ITALY

I cannot yet present any technical or organisational scheme for the surveys of the future, because much depends on the will of the various players, be they publishers or advertisers. From a strictly technical-methodological point of view, it is clear that much study is still needed regarding the advertisers' requests and the methods of validating the current surveys.

It is certain that newspapers and magazines are moving towards a single readership survey, because in this way they can present a united front to the television medium.

First we must await the results of the experiments now underway and allow the Technical Committee of the publishers participating in the survey to study these results.

Only when the publishers are convinced that the current balance between newspapers and magazines remains similar within certain statistically acceptable limits, and regardless of the actual levels of readership obtained, whilst it be possible to conduct a single survey with a single sample, single questionnaire, single data processing and production of reports and tape for media planners.

At that point, operational aspects such as sample size, costs, etc, should not present any obstacles.

The real technical problem involves the question of estimating the number of readers of every single issue of every single publication – newspaper or magazine in the survey.

As far as I know, no collective readership survey has ever approached or resolved the problem of providing readership figures issue by issue for a series of publications on a continuing basis, but I would be happy to be contradicted by any of my colleagues here in Barcelona.

The Technical Committee (in which I have participated since 1972), was rather surprised by this demand, not least because of doubts concerning the real practical usefulness of this information to media planners, not to mention the excessive cost of setting up and maintaining a research system that keeps track of the number of readers publication by publication, issue by issue.

But then which readers? Only those not replicated in the publication interval of each single publication? With what objective? To ask for subsequent rebates on advertising space bought, based on the actual number of readers effectively reached by a given issue? There are still many questions which need to be answered. The challenge of the Nineties has begun.

The response is neither simple nor painless: there are technical and economic problems, as well as aspects of politics and competition among publishing groups.

The Recent Reading method is valid because universally accepted, but the FTY (First-Time Read Yesterday) method also has its supporters. Undoubtedly the current market situation will have its influence. At this point of the discussion, the publishers seem unwilling to give up the Recent Reading method, even if they agree to test certain validation methods such as a readership panel and the FTY technique.

Given the large number of existing publications, however, both the readership panel and the FTY method with telephone interviewing are doomed to be impracticable or excessively costly alternatives to the current PR system with face-to-face interviews.

I hope to be able to confirm these hypotheses of mine at the next Symposium in 1990.