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A SURVEY OF THE USE OF QUALITATIVE DATA IN MAGAZINE EVALUATION

In the States, a great deal of data are made available to media planners to evaluate magazines.

Some are measurements gathered in the basic audience measurement surveys. Others are from special analyses done for just this purpose.

They fall into four general categories:

Circulation

Extensive analyses are available of how the book gets distributed and at what price and the means used to maintain and bolster circulation, and circulation size and growth. These are data supplied by the publication to the Audit Bureau of Circulation.

How the book is read

These are measures collected in the readership surveys. They encompass such things as how the book was attained, how read (time spent, number of occasions), attitudinal questions, etc.

Reader characteristics

These are special analyses of specific characteristics of the readers to cluster them into socio-economic and/or attitudinal or psychographic groupings – more complex than simple one-dimensional demographic data. These tabulations are done by the reader surveyors.

Magazine characteristics

Analyses of the make-up of the magazine with respect to editorial and advertising.

A survey of major US agency media planners has been done to report to what extent and how these data are used in evaluating magazines.

METHODOLOGY

A questionnaire was developed asking about the use of qualitative data in magazine planning.

The Media Research Directors of ten major agencies were asked to have Planning Executives in their Media Departments fill it in. Results were obtained from nine agencies and a total of 43 planners.

OVERALL FINDINGS

Usage of the data

The first question asked was if such factors as circulation reader quality, editorial environment and planner judgment were used in magazine evaluation. There was almost universal agreement that each of the four was used.

The measures asked about were not always used for most brands. Data on circulation and editorial environment were usually used for 'most'. But, the qualitative measures collected from readership surveys were used much more selectively. On average, such measures were used by only 20% of planners for 'most brands'.

The most used of all these data are those which describe the magazine (advertising, editorial ratios, editorial content, degree of competitive advertising). Virtually all of those surveyed use these data and use them regularly for

most brands. A lot of planner efforts go into understanding the environment in which the ad is to be placed.

An almost equally used category is circulation analyses – changes in circulation, subscription analyses and price charged. All who use these make reference to their being indicators of the magazine's 'vitality'.

Qualitative measures collected from the readership surveys are less used than these other data. But, still more than half of the planners surveyed use the average of these measures, with the least used being referred to by at least 40% of the planners.

The category of data which planners use least are those which attempt a measure of lifestyle, attitudes and/or psychographics. This is, to some extent, a matter of data availability. (Not all agencies or magazines subscribe to these data.) But, even here 42% of the agencies surveyed had a planner using one or more of these tabulations.

Agencies appear not to have set standards or policies on the use of these data. There is as much variation in use among planners within an agency as there is there among planners across all agencies.

In summary, there is considerable use made of these data. Usage varies among magazine planners and appears to be left to their discretion.

How the data are used

The data, when used, do not appear to be used in a mechanical way; that is, used as factors to adjust audience and efficiency.

The survey asked for each measurement 'How used' and 'Reasons not used'. As might be expected with an open question, there was a fairly

wide range of answers to the how used question and a lot of 'no answers'.

There were only three measures for which the replies suggested they were part of a standard adjustment of audience data. Primary/passalong, page exposure, publication rating (the last could be confusion since it was clearly taken to mean coverage by a number of respondents).

The preponderance of answers suggested that the measure was used to indicate the 'vitality of the book' and/or 'reader involvement' with the book.

There was also much reference to the measure being used as a 'tie breaker'.

Some data are used for highly specific situations (eg a recipe clipping measure used for a food ad, a specific place of reading used for specific copy, doctor's office reading for a medicine ad, etc).

It was also asked if these measures are not used, why they are not. Answers tended to be concerned with the validity of the data or the utility for relevance to magazine evaluation for the brand.

CONCLUSIONS AND ANALYSES OF FINDINGS

Magazine planners refer to a large array of qualitative data in evaluating magazines.

Great emphasis is placed on learning about the environment in which the ad is to be placed to find evidence of compatibility with the advertising effect on advertising impact.

There is clearly strong belief that readers approach magazines differently and read them

with varying degrees of intensity and involvement and that the greater that involvement, the more likelihood that the ad will fare better. Many of these measures are used as indicators of such involvement. The planner is keenly aware that they are surrogates for measures of differences in advertising impact in different books.

He, therefore, uses these measures as input into what is called 'planner judgments' about books, but usually does not use them in calculations of audience and efficiency.

DETAILED FINDINGS

Ad to editorial ratios and measures of editorial environment are used by all planners; the majority use them for most brands. This is an effort to judge editorial environment.

Circulation growth and/or change is also used universally (98% of planners). Those who said how they used it usually made references to its being an indication of the book's 'vitality'. Since few books actually do have dramatic changes in circulation, this is probably not a great influence on magazine planning.

Competitive advertising (86%) was heavily used. Few answered the how used question.

Reduced price subscription (86%) was used by as many planners but only half of these used it for most brands. The usual explanation for how it was used was that it was an indication of magazine 'vitality' - the thought being that those magazines having to resort to sales and promotions might be having some circulation difficulties.

Primary/passalong (79%) was used by a majority of the planners for most brands. An equal number said it was an indication of magazine

vitality or reader involvement as said that it was a part of a standard audience adjustment in evaluating magazines.

Reading time (79%) was the next most frequently used measure, although, in fact, the questionnaire referred to time spent reading. Many of the planners who said they used it, interpreted that as *when* the book was read and made references to the need for fast exposure to the advertising.

Actions taken (63%) was used in large measure for very specific situations. That is, when running coupons or recipes, etc, planners looked for measures of the propensity of readers to clip material from magazines.

Place of reading (60%) was referred to as an indication of reader involvement. That is, presumably the planner was considering out-of-home reading less beneficial exposure. Other planners suggested that they looked for specific places of reading as some possible exposure in relation to the copy being presented (eg cosmetic advertising for beauty parlour reading, medical advertising for doctor's office reading).

Subscription renewals (56%) was next in order of planner usage. Planners, once again, talked about this as an indication of the magazine's 'vitality'. Since this is not readily available for all magazines, it is probably used only when magazines reveal the data and therefore, has no great impact on magazine planning.

Loyal readers (47%) was also used as an indication of reader involvement with the book. Presumably, those who read the book repeatedly are those who like it and might be better affected by advertising.

Page exposure (47%) was used as an indication of reader and as involvement as a 'tie breaker'.

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Reading days (42%) was used as an indication of reader involvement. It was also referred to as being used as a 'tie breaker'.

Publication rating (40%) This is a measure of attitudes toward the book. A number of respondents took it to mean coverage so the data are not clear.

Interest in advertising (42%) Little was said about how it was used. There were references to 'planning judgment'.

Psychographic measures, as indicated above, were used the least of all. This is usually a function of agencies and/or magazines not subscribing to the data.

A STUDY OF THE USE OF QUALITATIVE DATA IN MAGAZINE EVALUATION

APPENDIX

Are such factors as these used in magazine planning at your agency?

QUESTIONNAIRE

Qualitative analysis of magazines

Magazine evaluations are often based on data other than the demographics and/or purchasing habits of the readers.

These can be information on how the book is acquired; how it is read; reader attitudes to it. Or, data on readers' lifestyles, social attitudes or psychographics can be used. Alternatively, the planners' judgment on the suitability of the magazine can be a factor.

	Yes %	No %
Circulation	95	-
Reader quality	93	-
Editorial environment	100	-
Planners' judgment	100	-

Will you please indicate on the attached form (shown below) the extent to which your agency uses such data; how they are used and, if they are not used, why not.

	Used for most brands %	Used for a few brands %	Total %	How used	Reason not used
Circulation					
Growth	77	21	98		
Subscription renewals	23	33	56		
Reduced price subscriptions	42	44	86		
Audience					
Primary/passalong	51	28	79		
Place of reading	16	44	60		
Reading days	7	35	42		
Reading time	14	65	79		
Page exposure	14	33	47		
Actions taken	14	49	63		
Publication rating	28	12	40		
Interest in advertising	12	30	42		
Loyal readers (4/4 issues)	21	33	47		
ACORN		2	2		
Cluster plus		12	12		
PRIZM	2	24	26		
VALS	2	21	23		
Editorial environment					
Ad/edit ratios	74	26	100		
Relevant editorial	95	5	100		
Competitive advertising	74	12	86		