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### THE MEASUREMENT OF READING INTENSITY AND IMPLICATIONS FOR PLANNING

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#### SUMMARY

This paper attempts to assess the relevance, in the Indian context, of measuring reading quality: whether such measures provide new information or insights, whether they help in discriminating between publications, and the degree to which the various measures of reading quality are associated with each other.

#### INTRODUCTION

The Indian NRS is, by far, the largest readership survey in the world, involving interviews with over 100,000 adults residing in over 600 towns spread all over the country. Recently, during the planning stages of the Fourth Indian NRS, there was a view expressed by some publishers and users of NRS data that it would add value to the research if one were to include measures of reading quality.

The readership researchers who have carried out work in this area are divided in their opinions on the merits of including questions on reading quality. While some (Joyce 1985) believe that adding reading quality measures will at times dramatically affect candidate lists of magazines for a schedule, others (Denon 1981) are of the view that such measures are of little utility.

India presents a slightly different readership scene compared with other countries. While there are a very large number of publications (with at least 300 of them having a reasonably large circulation), there are very few of them within a language and interest group. Also, the range in readership levels is large, the coefficient of variation in readership levels ranging

between 40% and 85% for various language and interest groups of publications considered for this study. Another confounding factor is the very high level of readers-per-copy for some magazines, evidence of which was presented in the Salzburg Symposium (Puliyl 1985).

Together with this, one must take into account the factor of costs, because every additional question on the questionnaire means an additional 100,000 questions for the survey. Even if it is useful to add on measures of reading quality, it is necessary to evolve a parsimonious set of such indices.

#### THE BUSINESSMEN'S READERSHIP SURVEY

An opportunity to assess the usefulness of the measures of reading quality in India was provided by the Businessmen's Readership Survey (BRS). The BRS was the first large-scale readership survey in the country which had measures of reading intensity. This study, carried out by Indian Market Research Bureau, covered, through face-to-face interviews, over 8,000 businessmen, executives, professionals, government officials and industrialists in the 12 largest cities in the country.

In the BRS, information is collected for each publication on the frequency of reading, and for the publications read within the qualifying period, information is obtained on:

- provenance or sourcing of copy
- place of reading
- intensity of reading
- preferences in terms of usefulness of coverage (by interest group).

Appendix I provides details on the wording of questions to measure reading quality and the close-ended options used for recording answers. The intensity of reading was measured using a six-point picture scale with graded responses on the number of pages read or glanced at ranging from the 'All' position to 'None'. The question on preferences in terms of usefulness of coverage yielded poor data, as many respondents could not state their preferences. Findings on this question are, therefore, excluded from the analysis of this paper.

## FOCUS OF THE STUDY

The aim of this paper is to provide answers to such questions as:

(1) Does average issue readership (AIR) weighted by the intensity of reading have any relevance or value in the Indian context? Are the rankings of publications any different using the weighted AIR measures? Would media schedules be dramatically different using reading quality data ?

(2) Which measure of reading quality discriminates best between publications ?

(3) Which measures of reading quality are more closely associated with each other? And through this exercise, is it possible to identify one or two effective indices of exposure quality?

(4) Can specialist magazines claim to have a more interested audience? Do these titles have greater intensities of reading ?

(5) Is there a relationship between reading intensity and the demographics and socio-economic characteristics of the reader ? That is, is reading intensity more closely associated with person characteristics than with publication characteristics?

(6) Are those who are heavier readers also more intense readers ?

In this study, we have accessed data from the Businessmen's Readership Survey for two cities – Delhi and Hyderabad. The selection of respondents in the BRS is a two-step procedure. At the first stage, about 7,000 households in Delhi and 5,000 households in Hyderabad were contacted. At the second stage, 1,007 adults in Delhi and 599 adults in Hyderabad, who met the target specification for the BRS, were interviewed for the readership section of the survey. The readership measurement was carried out using the Recent Reading technique aided with black-and-white photographic reproductions of the mastheads.

## DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

### Weighting by reading quality

Some researchers have held that weighting average issue readership (AIR) by reading intensity could provide quite different media scheduling decisions from those using standard AIR estimates as input. In order to assess whether this is so we weighted AIR estimates, using the picture-scale data on reading intensity as weights. Two kinds of analyses were carried out. We examined, within publication interest groups, first, the number of publications for which the rank order of publications has changed, and secondly, the extent of variance between the weighted and the standard AIR measures. A summary of the analysis is presented in Table 1.

The findings in Table 1 indicate that out of the 39 publications included for this analysis, only five publications shifted ranks (maximum shift – one rank) by using reading intensity as weights. And, moreover, the extent of variance between the weighted and standard AIR scores are low, with 22 of the 32 publications where

Table 1

Do weighted AIR measures provide different results?

Interest group	No of publications			Extent of variance between weighted and standard AIR scores		
	Included in analysis	Whose rank order has changed	Where comparisons are possible on indexed AIR scores	More than 4% points	Between 2 and 4% points	Less than 2% points
<b>DELHI:</b>						
General dailies	7	None	6	—	—	6
General interest magazines	7	2	6	2	2	2
Business magazines	2	None	1	—	—	1
Science/electronics magazines	5	1	4	1	—	3
Computer magazines	4	None	3	2	—	1
<b>HYDERABAD:</b>						
General dailies	6	None	5	—	—	5
General interest magazines	7	2	6	1	2	3
Business magazines	2	None	1	—	—	1
Total	39	5	32	6	4	22

such an indexed comparison is possible, showing a variance of only two percentage points.

This analysis also leads us to believe that ascertaining reading intensity data for general dailies is of little value to the researcher as variances between weighted and standard AIR scores are extremely low.

### Discriminating ability

One of the key parameters for evaluating measures of reading quality is their power to discriminate between publications within the same interest group. In order to assess which of these measures discriminate better than the others we have computed the coefficient of variation within several interest groups. The higher the coefficient, the greater the variation in data. The measure of reading quality which consistently, across several groups, discriminates between publications would be preferred over others which do not have this ability.

The analysis provided in Table 2 appears to indicate that, in India, provenance or sourcing of copy is a more discriminating attribute than other measures, including the intensity of reading measured through the picture scale. It also indicates that the place of reading is not a very consistent measure for discriminating between publications within an interest group.

### The extent of correlation

Another touchstone for measuring the utility of the data provided by measures of reading quality is to examine whether these are highly correlated with each other and with measures already included in the NRS, such as the frequency of reading. To justify inclusion, the measures of reading quality must provide new data. In other words, those measures which are

not highly correlated with frequency of reading data are more valuable to the user of readership data. To examine this aspect we ran a series of correlations for general interest magazines, in both Delhi and Hyderabad, between the reading intensity measures and frequency of reading. The results of this analysis are presented in Table 3.

This analysis appears to indicate that intensity of reading is highly correlated with the frequency of reading. However, sourcing of copy and, more so, the place of reading appear to have low correlations with frequency of reading.

### Intensity of reading for specialist titles

One of the claims made by publishers of specialist titles is that, even though they have low circulation and readership levels, they have a far more interested audience, with greater intensity of reading. In order to verify these kinds of claims, an analysis was carried out comparing reading intensity for specialist titles and for general interest magazines. For specialist titles, two measures of reading intensity were computed: one at the overall level for all readers, and the other, specifically for the 'target' readers ie for magazines related to the share market, we used the target definition of investors and for computer magazines we used the specific target definition as those in electronic data processing departments or involved in the purchase of computer hardware/software.

From the analysis presented in Table 4 it is clear that specialist titles cannot lay claim to having a larger proportion of interested readers at the overall levels. However, using a very restricted definition of the target readers does improve reading intensity scores and these differences are significant at the 99% level.

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Table 2

Which measure of reading quality discriminates best?

	DELHI			HYDERABAD		
	General dailies	General magazines	Specialist magazines	General dailies	General magazines	Specialist magazines
Measures of reading quality						
No of publications included in analysis	7	7	8	6	7	7
Average Issue Readership						
Mean	23	26	5	40	28	8
CV%	85	62	70	42	59	72
Frequency of reading						
Mean	87	73	62	90	75	75
CV %	8	16	15	4	15	15
Sourcing of copy						
Mean	52	32	23	48	35	18
CV %	31	36	36	22	38	65
Place of reading						
Mean	57	58	41	52	57	28
CV %	25	15	33	5	18	64
Intensity of reading						
Mean	4.6	4.2	4.0	5.0	4.4	3.9
CV %	2	9	8	2	9	8

To interpret the mean scores for measures of reading quality please refer to Appendix II.

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**Table 3****Correlations with frequency of reading**

	General interest magazines		
	Both cities	Delhi	Hyderabad
No of publications included in analysis	14	7	7
Sourcing of copy	0.56	0.57	0.69
Place of reading	0.27	0.33	0.22
Intensity of reading	0.94	0.90	0.91

**Table 4****Readers of specialist titles:  
a more interested audience?**

Interest group	Target group definition	Reading intensity scores
<b>DELHI:</b>		
General interest magazines	All readers	4.2
Financial/share market magazines	All readers	4.2
	Only investors	4.5
Computer magazines	All readers	4.1
	Only those associated	4.5

**Reading intensity and demographics**

Are some kinds of people more likely to be heavier readers than others? Is there any relationship between reading intensity and

**Table 5****Reading intensity and demographics of respondent**

	Results of the ANOVA F-Ratio
Reading intensity and –	
Income	Significant at the 1% level
Education	Significant at the 1% level
Age	Not significant

demographics? To answer these questions an analysis was carried out for Delhi (Table 5).

A related issue is the question of whether heavier readers (that is, those reading a larger number of publications) are also more intense readers. We present in Table 6 the intensity scores of readers categorised by the number of publications read.

From this analysis it is clear that the heavier readers, who are also likely to be higher in terms of income as well as education, tend to be more intense readers of publications.

**Reading intensity and sourcing**

Primary readers (that is, those who buy the copy of the publication) have significantly higher reading intensity scores compared with passalong readers.

Table 7 gives for selected publications in Delhi the reading intensity scores for primary as well as secondary readers.

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**Table 6****Reading intensity and heaviness of readership**

No of publications read	Reading intensity scores
1 to 3 publications	4.41
4 to 6 publications	4.65
7 to 9 publications	4.72
10 to 15 publications	5.66
16 + publications	5.46

F-ratio significant at 1% level

**Table 7****Reading intensity and sourcing**

	Reading intensity of	
	Primary readers	Secondary readers
India Today	5.0	4.3 ***
Reader's Digest	4.8	4.0 ***
Illustrated Weekly	4.6	4.2 ***
Sunday	4.8	4.4 **
Business India	4.9	3.9 ***
Science Today	4.5	3.7 ***

\*\*\* significant at 99%

\*\* significant at 95%

**CONCLUSIONS**

Weighting of average issue readership (AIR), using reading intensity as weights, is of little value in India. The extent of variation between the standard and the weighted AIR is too small significantly to affect media scheduling decisions. For dailies, especially, reading intensities are of little consequence.

Specialist titles cannot lay claim to greater intensities of reading, except for a very restricted definition of the target readers. Such a claim can also be self-defeating in that it draws attention to the small size of the target segment reached through the specialist title.

However, reading intensity does throw up interesting differences when comparing publications across different interest groups, between primary and secondary readers of publications, and between different demographic segments of readers. The value of this information appears to be academic in nature rather than relevant for media planning.

**References**

- Denon, L (1981). Some measurement of reading quality. New Orleans Proceedings.
- Joyce, T (1985). The measurement of magazine page exposures. Salzburg Proceedings.
- Puliyel, T (1985). High readers-per-copy. Salzburg Proceedings.

## APPENDIX I

### Reading quality measures on the BRS: question wording

#### Provenance or Sourcing of copy

##### Show card 1

This card has a list of the various ways by which a person can get to read a magazine or newspaper. Please think back on the last time that you looked at – (*Publication*). How exactly did you obtain the copy? Please choose an answer from the card.

---

home delivery/subscription

news-stand

office copy

others

---

cannot remember

---

#### Place of reading

##### Show card 2

Think back on the last time you read or looked at – (*publication*). At which of these places did you read – (*publication*)?

---

own home

own office

other home

other office, waiting room, barber, etc.

bus, train, air travel

---

cannot remember

---

#### Intensity of reading

##### Show card 3

On this card we have six pictures of a magazine. The first one has all its pages shaded – which means that all the pages have been read or looked at. The last one has no pages shaded at all – which means that none of the pages were read. The other pictures in between show a magazine with some pages shaded, that is, some of the pages have been read.

For some publications, I would like to know how much you usually see by the time you have finished with a copy – by pointing out one of the pictures on the card.

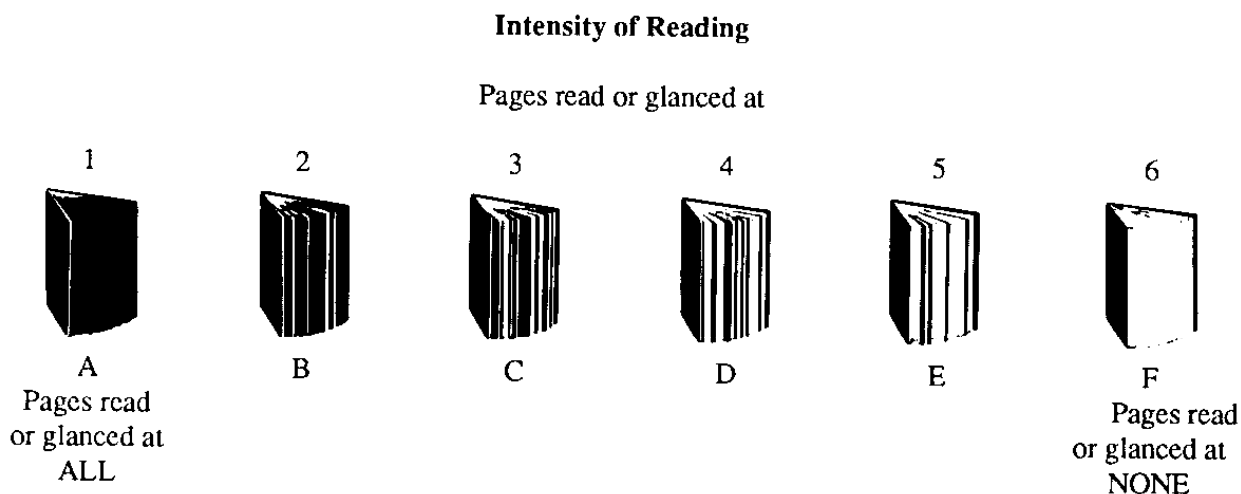
##### Explain

It does not matter if you have not read everything there is on a page. It is enough if you have glanced at the page for some time.

On an average, when you read a copy of – (*publication*), how many pages would you normally have seen by the time you've finished with it?



## Card 3



## APPENDIX II

## Reading quality measures : notes to be read along with Table 2

### *Mean score on Average Issue Readership*

This is the average AIR level for the publications within the group expressed as percent of all adults.

### *Mean score on frequency of reading*

This is the average frequency of reading of publications within the group expressed as a percentage. Thus, a figure of 87 for general dailies would imply an average frequency of 6.1 issues out of 7  $\frac{(87 \times 7)}{100}$ .

### *Mean score on sourcing of copy*

This is the average percentage of respondents who claim to have purchased the publication either through home delivery or off the newsstand.

### *Mean score on place of reading*

This is the average percentage of respondents who claim to have read the publication at their own home.

### *Mean score on intensity of reading*

This is the score on the picture scale, on which the maximum possible score is 6.0 (All) and the minimum score 1.0 (None).