

## 2.5 Why not more use of recognition?

This short contribution is not intended as a formal paper. It is intended purely to stimulate discussion.

We have a limited number of methods for measuring readership audiences. The main methods are:

- (a) the recency or recent reading method.
- (b) the frequency method.
- (c) the through-the-book method.

The writer contends that the seldom-used fourth method, that of cover recognition, is a simple method that is rather neglected.

Why is simple or straightforward recognition accepted in certain disciplines and not in others?

The literature on readership research is riddled with examples of false claiming by informants, such as claims to have seen or read publications which had not appeared on the market, or of informants claiming recognition of advertisements that have never been run. On the other hand there are also numerous examples where straight recognition seems to be completely acceptable. Where does the 'truth' lie? When is recognition acceptable?

Throughout the world recognition is an accepted tool by the police in identity parades and the recognition of criminals. It may be claimed that people are sometimes falsely arrested through incorrect recognition, but by and large recognition is considered permissible evidence in virtually all countries and in the overwhelming majority of cases recognition of a suspect is accepted by the law.

A typical example of the above is in the recent case of the British ripper. The identikit photo of the criminal which was based on fleeting glimpses of him by only one or two of the women attacked yielded a picture which was remarkably close to reality.

In an article in the *Britannica Year Book of Science* of 1977, the well-known American psychologist W K Estes makes the following claim: "Experimenters, including Roger N Shepard and Lionel Standing, have presented subjects with hundreds or even thousands of pictures of complex scenes and then obtained virtually perfect performance on tests of *recognition*".

In our own memory decay experiments which we undertook in South Africa, and which were based on substantial samples (n = 4133), we found recognition provided a remarkably reliable indicator of proven exposure.

In poster research which we have undertaken, and which involved showing informants photographs of actual poster sites, we have found that the inclusion of dummy posters in the recall lists led to false claiming or false recognition of posters running at about 18%.

It is rather interesting that this 18% is the same as the figure recorded with dummy posters in Britain by Harry Henry in his 'Size and Nature of the Poster Audience' (1949). It is, however, also interesting that the dummy posters shown to informants, were in fact based on *actual products* on the market and the posters did in fact, resemble current advertising being used by these companies. In the case where completely fictitious products were shown, the false claiming dropped to 3%.

It would appear, as Wally Langschmidt has claimed elsewhere, that in cases where the original exposure was reasonably thorough, that recognition does work well. Where the exposure was unintentional and superficial, recognition does not work particularly well. It is doubtful whether any method of measurement works well when the original stimulus was so superficial that it could not have made an impression on the informant. Evidence to support this contention is found in the difference between our findings in casual or unintentional readership in public places such as beauty parlours, barber shops, doctors waiting rooms, etc, compared with informants who actually bought the publications. Further evidence for this is also found in the work of Marder which provided results very close to our own public place reading. (Marder's average recognition 61%, MRA's recognition 59%).

We have been running a series of ad recognition studies in which we do the following: our company has an advertising expenditure analysis service in which we actually measure all the advertisements that appear in South African publications.

We also receive detailed flighting information on all TV commercials from the SABC, complete details of film advertising in all cinemas and drive-ins, and detailed information on poster and bus shelter advertising. With this detailed information at our disposal we can actually 'recreate' the advertising schedule of any advertiser or advertisers in any specified product field. By feeding in the recreated advertising schedules of the advertisers we can calculate, via the All Media and Products Survey, what the possible exposure to the advertising *could have been* in the total market place and within specific target markets. We call this the 'Pie score' (Possible Index of Exposure).

Within the target market we then show informants miniatures of the actual advertisements which were used in the real life campaigns. Using the miniatures we obtain Actual Claimed Exposure scores: we call these the 'Ace' scores.

In these tests we have obtained in separate and in

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split runs remarkably consistent scores. For example, using full colour miniatures for press and magazine ads, and using black and white miniatures of the advertisements, the maximum difference has been 2%.

In the case of television commercials, we reproduce six or more key scenes from the TV commercial. In this case, the maximum difference between recognition as recorded from full colour reproductions and from black and white miniatures of the key scenes has been 4%.

It can be argued that 2 to 4% could represent a difference of hundreds of thousands of people as far as audience is concerned, but we believe that with the unknown knowledge of the conditions under which exposure took place, the play-back with an error level of limited size is adequate for everyday purposes.

It seems peculiar that through-the-book is often considered the 'Rolls-Royce' of readership measurement techniques yet it is based on the claimed recognition of a

number of articles or features in the publication. On the other hand when simpler forms of recognition are put forward in experimental designs to check on the validity of informant's claims, then recognition as a research method, is viewed with suspicion.

The claim that memory decay is a major factor in supporting the inadequacy of recognition is not supported by our own research.

In our memory decay experiment we recorded a drop of 8% in the recognition of magazine covers which we had observed people buying. This decline of 8% in recognition remained virtually constant over a period of up to 12 weeks, as is shown in the table below of the scores for the six individual publications involved.

The sole purpose of this short contribution is to provide a few examples of cases where recognition seems to work well.

**TABLE 1**  
Readership claims via test covers among 'proven' or 'observed buyers

Publication	Time lapse since observation of buying									Average whole period %
	Up to 2 weeks %	3 weeks %	4 weeks %	5 weeks %	6 weeks %	7 weeks %	8 weeks %	9 weeks %	10+ weeks %	
<b>Weeklies</b>										
Scope	88	92	92	81	91	89	85	86	86	89
Huisgenoot	92	100	88	96	91	91	92	85	100	92
Average of 2 weeklies	90	95	90	86	91	89	87	86	90	90
<b>Fortnightlies</b>										
Fair Lady	96	93	94	93	92	92	96	94	96	94
Rooi Rose	92	94	94	96	87	77	100	94	80	92
Average of 2 fortnightlies	95	93	94	93	91	88	97	94	94	93
<b>Monthlies</b>										
Garden & Home	90	93	91	96	95	91	86	100	80	92
Living & Loving	95	92	91	92	100	85	95	94	88	94
Average of 2 monthlies	93	93	91	94	98	87	91	96	84	93
<b>All</b>										
Total all 6 publications	92	95	93	91	93	88	91	92	91	92