

## 2.8 Circulation and readership: trend analysis

### INTRODUCTION

In the search for external criteria which could be used to validate readership figures, circulation represents an interesting possibility. Since different media attract a varying number of readers per copy, such validation efforts, however, may produce results which are difficult to interpret.

Trend analysis might be one way of at least partly overcoming the problems. This paper gives examples of relations between circulation and readership figures in Sweden from a period of 13 years. Sampling procedure, questionnaire design, scaling technique, data collection and tabulation procedures have been identical over the whole period.

### THE PROBLEM

When one tries to validate readership figures against circulation figures there are several disturbing factors:

- (a) *The number of readers per copy* of different media vehicles vary substantially. Circulation cannot verify the significance of this.
- (b) *Seasonal and occasional variations* prevail in both circulation and readership. These variations are hidden in the averages for periods of time.
- (c) *Changes in editorial concepts* and contents may attract or repel readers during the period of comparison, changing the number of readers per copy.
- (d) *Non-identity in timing* of periods for comparison, due to external circumstances outside control.

### THE SOLUTION

One way of partly overcoming the above mentioned problems would be to apply trend analysis. Because of the problems mentioned this analysis can hardly be done by using standard statistical tools.

What may be done is a graphical presentation of the figures, thus permitting an ocular inspection of the relations. Of course, we are not really talking of validation in the proper sense of the word. It is rather a matter of plausibility analysis.

With information at hand about the 'history' of each compared vehicle, its profile and readership structure, one might try to explain the patterns. With data from a sufficiently long period at hand the overall structure would give quite a reliable appreciation of the stability of the individual relations. And, hence, the ability of the method applied to reflect the relative changes in the average audiences.

### COMPARABLE DATA

The late Jarko Cerha's work *Selective Mass Communication* (1967) contains (pp 290–293) a discussion of the reliability, plausibility and validity of the ORVESTO method and TEM's empirical data: this should be regarded as complementary to the following trend analysis.

The basic conditions for doing this analysis are two: identical periods for the measurement of both circulation and readership, and a sufficient number of media vehicles. Such a set of information is available for 13 years (1968–80) from the Swedish ORVESTO readership data and the Swedish ABC figures.

The circulation figures are the number of copies sold in Sweden. Sales abroad are consequently deducted. The readership percentages represent the population aged 15–70, nationwide. This means that the readership figures are not totally comparable with circulation since some people over and below the age limits evidently also buy and read magazines.

All figures represent periods of six months, although for readership figures actual fieldwork took place only for part of the time.

In the graphs shown in **Figures 1–8**, eight randomly chosen weekly magazines are presented. Circulation and readership are plotted on an index basis, with the first half of 1968 as index 100.

### CONCLUSION

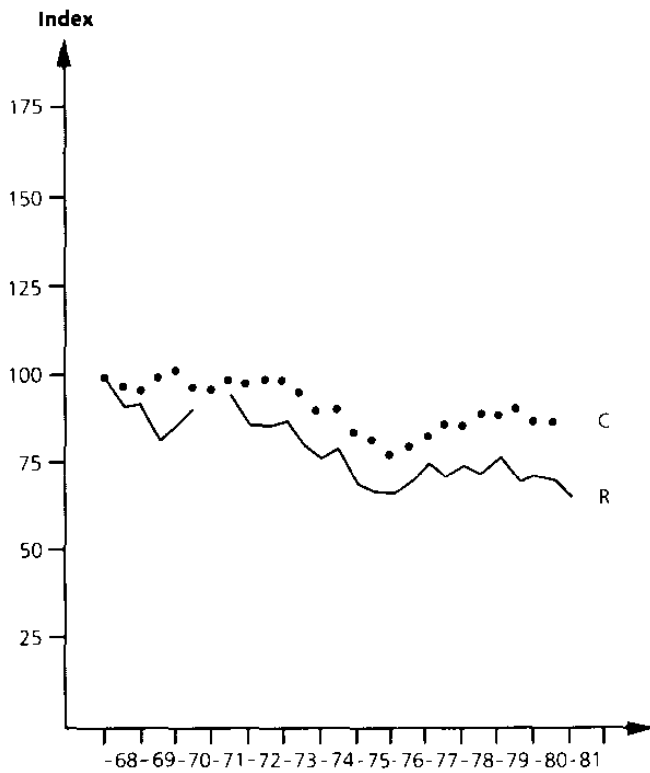
The overall pattern of the circulation vs readership relations is one of surprisingly strong stability, indicating a power of the readership study to reproduce at least the *relative* changes in reading behaviour.

The readership question implicitly puts the respondent in the position of estimating his reading behaviour "being in the present with his back against the past and his mind looking forward".

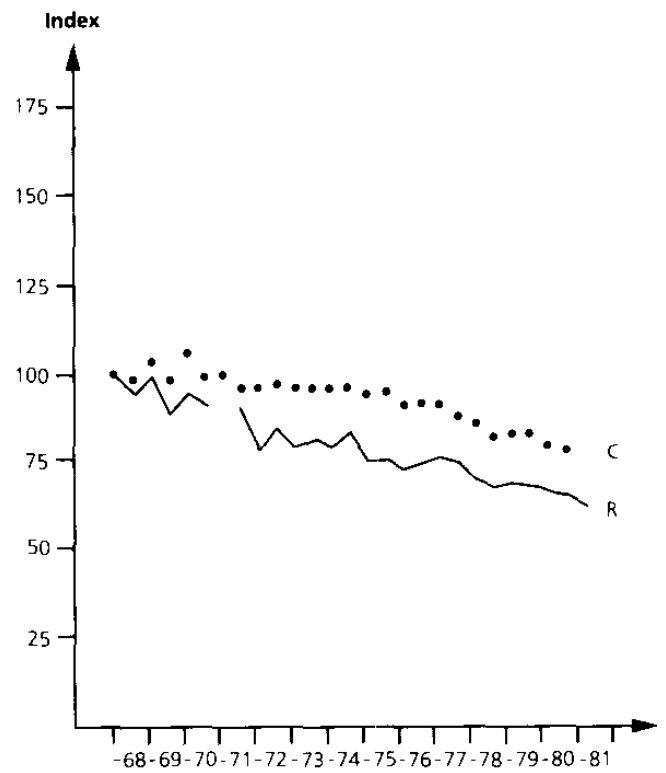
Close-up analysis of readership data for shorter intervals of time has shown tendencies in readership development to be more often prior to than after the corresponding changes in circulation.

This being the case, the evident solution to the production of relevant readership data would be to combine a prospective-oriented frequency scale with continuous fieldwork and instant and frequent reporting and analysis to overcome the real problem – the time lag between the planning and the execution of advertising.

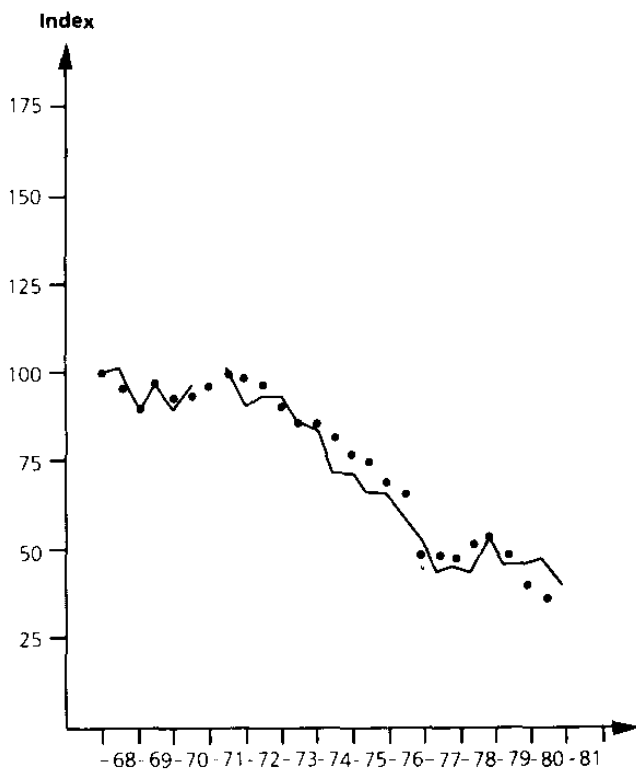
**FIGURE 1**  
Allers (Weekly. 67% female)



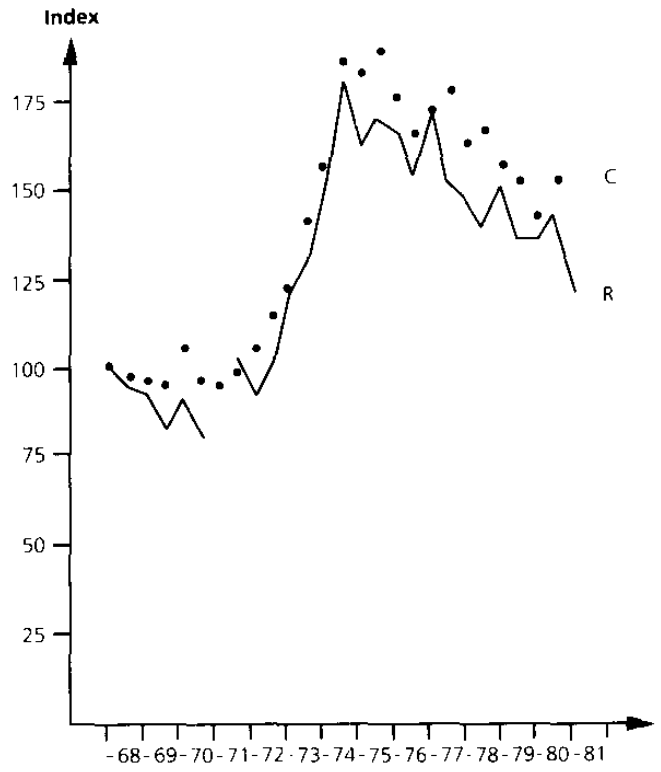
**FIGURE 3**  
Hemnets Veckotidning (Weekly. 67% female)



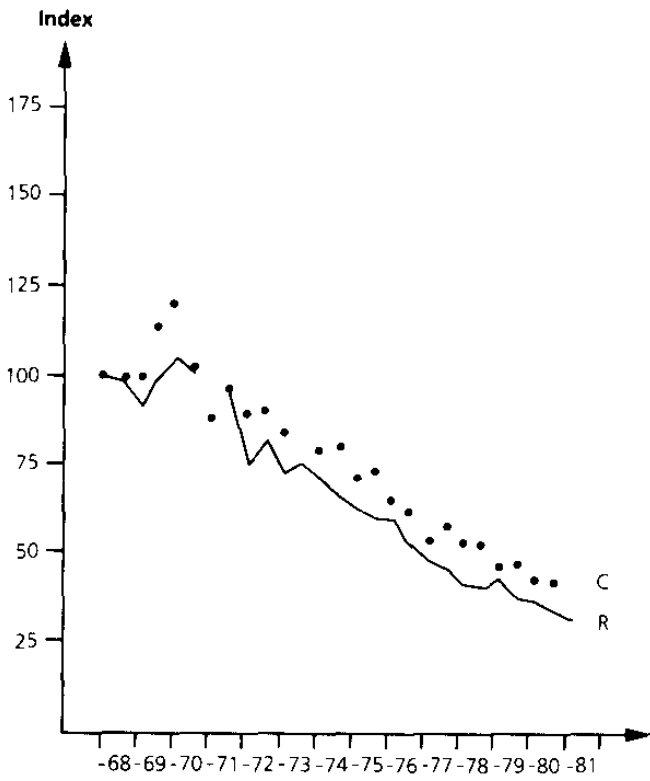
**FIGURE 2**  
Vecko Revyn (Weekly. 66% female)



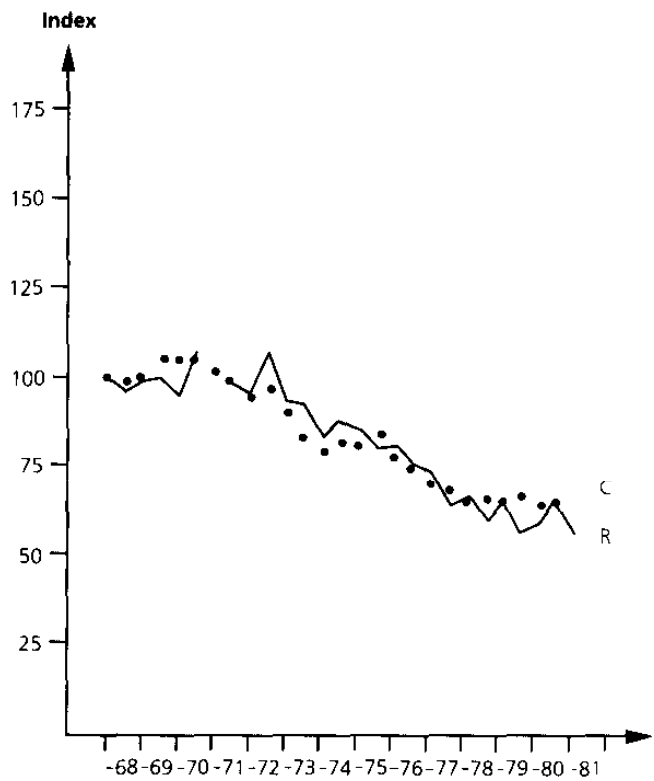
**FIGURE 4**  
Saxons Veckotidning (Weekly. 63% female)



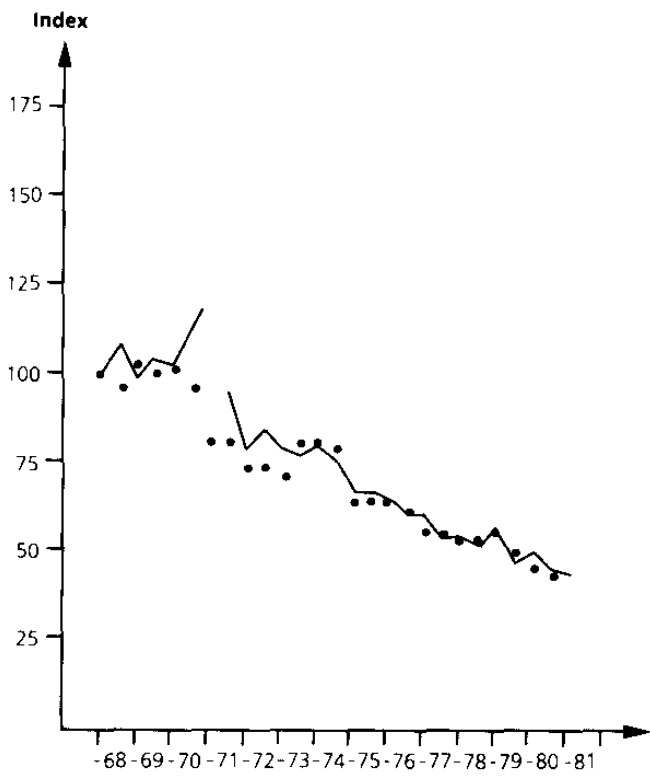
**FIGURE 5**  
**Femina (Weekly. 82% female)**



**FIGURE 7**  
**Min Värld (Weekly. 80% female)**



**FIGURE 6**  
**Damernas Värld (Weekly. 81% female)**



**FIGURE 8**  
**Husmodern (Weekly. 81% female)**

