

Michael Walter  
Gruner + Jahr AG & Co  
Hamburg, Germany

## WHEN LESS IS MORE A SPECIFIC GERMAN EXPERIENCE

### SYNOPSIS

The demand for information from media research increases constantly. This concerns both the number of titles for which information is desired, and the amount of information that should be surveyed for each title. This creates problems regarding the length of the questionnaire, and especially the burden for the respondents. A particular difficulty in this respect is, that the burden on the respondents in interviews varies immensely, depending on how many titles are read in the maximum readership.

In one particular experiment within the German Media Analysis, the influence of an extended questionnaire on the result could be measured, during the evaluation of a Parallel wave to the Standard Media Analysis with 2 additional questions concerning the page exposure for each title in the maximum readership.

The surveys were designed in such a way, that apart from the additional questions to the page exposure per title, all other conditions were left *ceteris paribus*. This means, that the differences in reach between the Standard Media Analysis and the additional wave can only have been caused by these two questions.

The result of this experiment was obvious: While the levels of reach between Standard MA and Parallel wave for respondents with up to 19 titles in their maximum readership were mostly identical, those people with more than 19 titles had a large decrease in the maximum readership and the reader per issue. Because of the questionnaire's design, it was impossible for the respondents to achieve "learning effect", so one can assume that the interviewer was "manipulating" the final results.

The decreases of reach have various distorting effects, differing from title to title. The reach of magazines whose readership consists mainly of low magazine users in general showed little variation, while magazines having a high reach of heavy magazine users are very much affected.

So, in the future of the German Media Analysis it is important, that the burden in interviews is distributed equally amongst the respondents, when additional criterias per title are surveyed.

## WHEN LESS IS MORE

### A SPECIFIC GERMAN EXPERIENCE

Everybody who has ever been involved with questionnaire design knows, that the ideal length and composition of questionnaires in market and media research is a highly relative subject.

Respondents let themselves be put under a lot of pressure. Interviews of more than an hour are not unusual in the media research. The strain that results from these surveys is described in the marketing literature under the name "respondent burden".

This raises an essential research problem: The effect of the length of the questionnaire and its contents on the quality of the results. I would like to demonstrate this important aspect with the example from reach research, because the exact measurement of reach for each title is essential for agencies and also the basis for a market oriented positioning of magazines.

The German Media Analysis, a reach survey which has been in existence for 35 years, is a good object to demonstrate this problem very well. I will restrict my explanations to those parts of the questionnaire dealing with consumer magazines.

The basic problem with the Media Analysis is, that due to the development of the media market it was forced to produce even more information for an increasing number of magazines. The number of titles has doubled over the last 20 years. This means, that even with the common questionnaire design without the additional questions regarding page exposure and exposure quality, the burden on the respondents obviously increased.

The questionnaire design of the German Media Analysis contains a clear filter system. (Chart 2). The problems with the MA were intensified during the last few years through the demand of advertisers and advertising agencies to establish - in addition to the reach also the advertisement exposure opportunity. These exposure opportunities of advertisements were defined as the probability of coming into contact with an average page in a magazine one time or more. Therefore 2 questions were developed and used for every title in the maximum readership (Chart 3).

The questionnaire design for the questions concerning the magazine usage including the questions about page exposure consists of 4 rather than 2 questions per title in the maximum readership (frequency and reader per issue) (Chart 4). The respondent burden in this context is determined by the number of titles used in the maximum readership. 11 out of 138 titles in the maximum readership is the average, but there is an extremely large variation (Chart 5). The consequence is, that in the standard MA interview 20 % of the respondents have to answer a maximum of 6 questions dealing with frequency and reader per issue, whereas 14 % of the respondents are burdened with at least 40 additional questions in this category.

## WHEN LESS IS MORE A SPECIFIC GERMAN EXPERIENCE

If the additional questions on page exposure are included in the questionnaire the differences in the length of the interview increase considerably:

14 additional questions have to be answered by the 20 % who are low magazine users, whereas the heavy magazine users are confronted with 80 additional questions.

The resulting effects of the integration of these additional questions on page exposure into the Media Analysis interview on the level of reach can precisely be measured.

Since experiences had already been made with these effects, the questions on page exposure were not integrated in the Standard wave of the MA, but were included in a Parallel wave. Both questionnaire designs were absolutely identical, which means that the interviews were executed under *ceteris paribus* conditions (Chart 6).

Comparing both surveys shows a heavy loss in the Parallel wave in gross reach of 88%, which corresponds to 43,13 million exposures (Chart 7) in the maximum readership of the Parallel wave.

The loss distribution however is not distributed equally. Fortnightly magazines loose relatively more in reach than weekly magazines.

There is a comparable situation for the reader per issue, which is the central media exposure unit in the German media planning (Chart 8).

The described effects become even more problematic if the different classifications of consumer magazines are compared (chart 9). Those titles which are regularly read (TV magazines, TV supplements and daily newspapers) are barely affected by the decrease in reach. On the other side, titles for special target groups and special interest titles which are read rather irregularly often showed dramatic decreases in reach.

What does all this have to do with the varying burden for the respondents as described above?

This question can be answered by the following chart (Chart 10):

Affected by this decrease in reach are nearly always only those interviews with more than 20 titles in the maximum readership. Of those 43,13 million contacts (= 88%) which were "missing" in the Parallel wave, 74% (= 76,72 million contacts) can be attributed to this group.

Since questionnaire design excludes learning effects by the respondents, the reason must be a result of interviewer influence. For instance, the threat to the interviewer that the respondent could refuse to finish the questionnaire as a result of its extreme length.

## WHEN LESS IS MORE A SPECIFIC GERMAN EXPERIENCE

So in fact it's the burden for the interviewer and not only the burden for the respondent that needs to be analysed in further research.

What can be done?

First of all, this year in Germany the additional information concerning page exposure will again be measured in a Parallel wave. The reason for this is, that the described decreases in reach, which must be attributed to methodical reasons only, cannot be accepted. The page exposure data of the Parallel wave will be merged with the Standard wave of the MA.

Generally the extremely different burden for the interviewers must also be reduced. The "filter - modell" of the German Media Analysis has to be critically examined.

Finally we have two more questions:

- 1.) Is it possible that already similar effects are occurring in the standard wave of the MA, which haven't been exposed until now ?
- 2.) Is the statement that sometimes "less is more" only a specific German experience ?

## Number of Consumer Magazines in the Media Analysis

|      |            |
|------|------------|
| 1972 | 62 titles  |
| 1982 | 97 titles  |
| 1990 | 138 titles |

Chart 2

## Questionnaire Design of the Media Analysis 90 (Magazines)

|                           |                          |                     |                    |
|---------------------------|--------------------------|---------------------|--------------------|
| <b>General filter:</b>    | unknown                  | known by name only  | had in hand before |
| <b>Time filter:</b>       |                          |                     |                    |
| monthly titles            | within the last 12 month | 1 to 2 years ago    | longer             |
| fortnightly titles        | within the last 6 month  | 1/2 to 1 year ago   | longer             |
| weekly titles             | within the last 3 month  | 1/4 to 1/2 year ago | longer             |
| <b>Frequency:</b>         | 1                        | 2-3                 | 4-5                |
|                           | 6-7                      | 8-9                 | 10-11              |
|                           | 12                       |                     |                    |
| <b>Readers per issue:</b> |                          |                     |                    |
| monthly titles            | within the last 4 weeks  | 1 to 2 month ago    | 2 to 3 month ago   |
| fortnightly titles        | within the last 14 days  | 2 to 4 weeks ago    | 4 to 6 weeks ago   |
| weekly titles             | within the last 7 days   | 8 to 14 days ago    | 2 to 3 weeks ago   |

In the survey for the Media Analysis 90 the following scales will be included:

- A) How many pages did you open altogether in order to read or look at something ?  
 B) How many of the magazine pages did you open twice or more in order to read or look at something ?

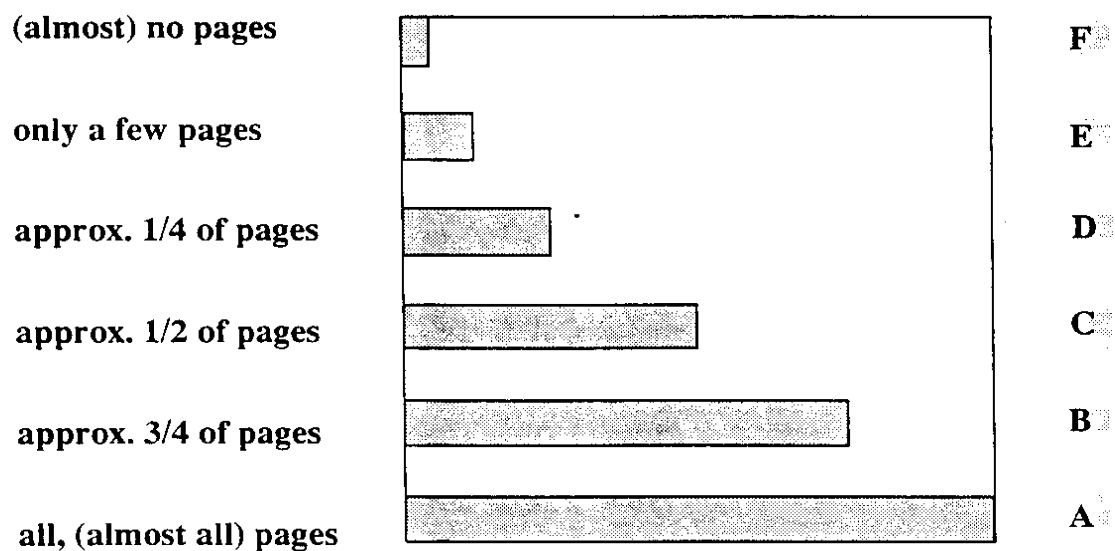


Chart 4

## Questionnaire Design of the Media Analysis

### Parallel wave (page exposure)

### Maximum readership (filter)

- Frequency
- Reader per issue

seperate for the different  
publication intervals

- Page exposure
- Multiple page exposure

all publication intervals  
together

## Reach (gross) Maximum Readership in %

**Basis: 138 Consumer Magazines**

|                    |           |
|--------------------|-----------|
| No title           | 2 %       |
| 1 - 3 titles       | 18 %      |
| 4 - 6 titles       | 20 %      |
| 7 - 12 titles      | 30 %      |
| 13 - 19 titles     | 16 %      |
| 20 titles and more | 14 %      |
| average            | 11 titles |

Chart 6

## MA - Parallel Wave to Page Exposure

### MA - Standard Survey

### Parallel Wave to Page Exposure

|                                    |                             |                                                                                      |
|------------------------------------|-----------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Definition of the universe:</b> | <b>absolutely identical</b> |                                                                                      |
| <b>Samples:</b>                    | <b>absolutely identical</b> |                                                                                      |
| <b>Institutes (6):</b>             | <b>absolutely identical</b> |                                                                                      |
| <b>Survey period:</b>              | <b>absolutely identical</b> | <b>(summer 1989)</b>                                                                 |
| <b>Questionnaire:</b>              | <b>absolutely identical</b> | <b>+ 2 additional questions of page exposure per title in the maximum readership</b> |

### Reach (gross) Maximum Readership in %

|                            | MA '90 | Parallel wave | Difference | Index<br>MA '90 = 100 |
|----------------------------|--------|---------------|------------|-----------------------|
| Sample size                | 6518   | 10156         |            |                       |
| Consumer magazines (138)   | 1081   | 993           | -88        | 92                    |
| Monthly magazines (74)     | 422    | 383           | -39        | 91                    |
| Fortnightly magazines (18) | 126    | 110           | -16        | 88                    |
| Weekly magazines (46)      | 534    | 500           | -34        | 94                    |

Chart 8

### Reach (gross) Reader per Issue in %

|                            | MA '90 | Parallel wave | Difference | Index<br>MA '90 = 100 |
|----------------------------|--------|---------------|------------|-----------------------|
| Sample size                | 6518   | 10156         |            |                       |
| Consumer magazines (138)   | 430    | 399           | - 31       | 93                    |
| Monthly magazines (74)     | 157    | 145           | - 22       | 92                    |
| Fortnightly magazines (18) | 40     | 34            | - 6        | 86                    |
| Weekly magazines (46)      | 233    | 219           | -14        | 94                    |



### Changes of Reach MA '90 / Parallel Wave

Readers per issue (gross) in %

Index MA '90 = 100

|                               |     |
|-------------------------------|-----|
| TV magazines                  | 97  |
| General interest magazines    | 92  |
| Weekly women's magazines      | 93  |
| Fortnightly women's magazines | 81  |
| Monthly women's magazines     | 88  |
| Motoring magazines            | 95  |
| House + garden magazines      | 85  |
| TV supplements                | 100 |
| Daily newspapers              | 98  |

Chart 10

### Reach (gross) Maximum Readership in %

|                                                   | MA '90 | Parallel wave | Difference |
|---------------------------------------------------|--------|---------------|------------|
| Sample size                                       | 6518   | 10156         |            |
| Consumer magazines                                | 1081   | 993           | - 88       |
| <b>Number of titles in the maximum readership</b> |        |               |            |
| 1 - 3                                             | 212    | 214           | + 2        |
| 4 - 6                                             | 497    | 500           | + 3        |
| 7 - 12                                            | 925    | 911           | - 14       |
| 13 - 19                                           | 1560   | 1561          | + 1        |
| 20 and more                                       | 2948   | 2874          | - 74       |