

WE HAVE TRAVELLED TO THE MOON AND NOW WE KNOW IT WASN'T WORTH THE EFFORT, OR DO WE? WAS IT WORTH TRAVELLING TO THE MOON?

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Summary

Three partners carried out a field test in Switzerland under the name "Consum Media Control" in order to find out

- a) whether consumer behaviour and consumer use of the media (printing, radio) could be measured at the same time
- b) whether an electronic recording device instead of written diaries would function technically and whether it would be accepted.

Main aims

Testing the methods of obtaining results

- technical function
- data transfer
- acceptance

Consumer research

- detailed reporting of daily purchases

Media research

- radio listening
- reading of newspapers and magazines
- harder penetration data on a daily basis
- observation of readers over time

Media planning / Effectivity check

- Relation of consumer and media habits to better media planning and checking on the effects of advertising

The most important results

- the test to check the methods of obtaining results was positive
 - the electronic recording of consumer behaviour is superior to written diaries
 - the people questioned reported their media behaviour very unreliably
 - the data on daily newspapers are only plausible after special analysis
 - the data on the reading of magazines has brought no plausible results up to now
 - the recording of actual behaviour with regard to media-consumption leads to results which are no better than those obtained by the traditional question about habits
 - it was not possible to observe reading behaviour over time
 - it was not possible to demonstrate that media planning is improved by relating consumption behaviour to use of the media
 - marketing is much more complex than the simple relationship of media contact and purchasing
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Consum Media Control CMC

Today I am pleased to be able to give you some results of a test which we carried out in Switzerland in 1989. The test involved checking to find out whether data on consumption and data on media use could be gathered from the same panel.

But please let me make one remark before I start. I am not a media researcher by profession but a businessman. I work in marketing and therefore am specially interested in the practical applications of these results.

Media research in Switzerland

Data on the press, television and radio in Switzerland are obtained by using different research methods and the information thus acquired originates from different people.

WEMF's national readership research

Our company, WEMF, is commissioned by Swiss publishers of printed media to carry out national readership research. Every year we question tens of thousands of readers in computer-aided telephone interviews. The results are used as contact probabilities for an average number, segmented according to socio-demographic features and according to consumer behaviour.

To calculate the readership rates, we use the frequency question "How many out of 6 successive issues of X do you normally read or leaf through?"

We are aware that this method is not without its problems and does not deliver especially hard data. We therefore feel obliged to continuously improve our procedures and to keep up with the latest developments.

The radio study by the SRG

The Swiss radio and television company, SRG, carries out approximately 20 000 interviews a year on radio listening and delivers results on a given date on a socio-demographic basis.

SRG's television research

Television behaviour is recorded by the SRG in a household panel with a meter system. The results are socio-demographically segmented.

Single Source

The planner has to consult different data records for several media and draw his conclusions from them. Consumption-related definitions are only possible for the printing media. Instead of many isolated studies, he would prefer information from a single source which tells him both about purchasing behaviour and media consumption and the relationship between the two. In this way, the marketing man and the media planner would be able to do without questionable detours into the field of socio-demographically-defined target groups and media planning could be better geared to marketing. This would be bound to result in a considerable increase in efficiency:

dimensions:

- socio-demographics
- consumer behaviour

media:

- television viewing
- radio listening
- reading of printed media

The consumer panel of IHA

The IHA is a private market research institute which maintains a household panel whose participants permanently report on their purchases. The idea of replacing the written diaries of the household panel with an electronic recording device and also of recording radio-listening and reading behaviour at the same time seems to us to be strikingly elegant. Television behaviour is to be included later as well.

Consum Media Control CMC

The three partners SRG, IHA and WEMF decided on a six-month field test under the name "Consum Media Control". This concerned not only the technical feasibility of the electronic diary and the problem of whether the people questioned would accept it. We also wanted to try to obtain harder and more detailed data on the use of the media on a daily basis both with regard to printed media and radio listening.

In this way we hoped to achieve an improvement in media planning. We believed that we could carry out a better check on the effectivity of advertising because the system provides a connection between the course of an advertising campaign and the sales which are aimed for.

Hardware and data communication

I would now like to consider the testing equipment. The recording device MODATA was the size of a small book and consisted of a one-line display, a keyboard and a reading pen for bar codes. The memory card had to be sent in to the computer center every week.

Sampling

The testing area was Berne, the capital of Switzerland and the surrounding country. The inhabitants both in the city and the surrounding country are of mixed types and the structure of the media is varied. There are two local radio stations and two regional newspapers.

The random survey was to include another member of the family besides the person responsible for housekeeping and be of a generally acceptable size. The panel participants were committed to a period of six months.

The recruiting of the participants in the panel turned out to be very costly and time intensive. Out of 4218 households contacted, 2535 fulfilled the quotas and finally 186 of these households containing a total of 352 people began the test. This is a 7 per cent sampling rate which, according to the IHA specialists, was comparable with other panels. The sampling rates in our telephone surveys of the readership is somewhat over 70 % and thus about ten times greater.

The random survey was representative in the most important socio-demographic segments. There were no indications found that the panel participants behaved in a significantly atypical way in their use of the media.

All participants were to report daily on the media they used and the 186 people in charge of housekeeping were to report in addition what products they had bought and in what package sizes, what they paid for them and in what store they had bought the article.

As far as possible, the EAN codes printed on the products were used and code books were handed out for recording unpackaged products and media.

The radio stations which were listened to had to be entered every quarter of an hour and, with the printed media, different additional information had to be given, namely how intensively they had read, when they had done the reading and where.

What were the results of the technical test?

On the whole, the device proved itself with regard to user-friendliness and was accepted and liked.

The most significant weak point turned out to be the reading pen as, with deep-frozen products and lumpy packaging such as pasta and bottles, the codes could only be read with difficulty or not at all.

The communication of data functioned extremely well. Not one memory card was damaged or lost.

All those questioned preferred using the electronic diary to writing by hand. Even older people had no problems with it.

During the test, only 10 families dropped out. This is remarkably few considering that they had to sacrifice more than a quarter of an hour per day on average and over the whole period of the test spent a complete working week with the device. For doing this they were given a bonus of 150 Swiss francs. Many participants complained they had no personal feedback. They would have liked, for example, lists of what they had bought and so on. This wish could hardly be satisfied in an actual use of this method as it would certainly falsify the results.

How did the test function with regard to its content?

As far as daily consumer goods are concerned, the test brought results which matched those from the traditional written diaries very well. It is astonishing how disciplined and reliable the reports on purchases were after a certain period of acclimatisation since about 3/4 of the purchases were entered daily.

The data on the media were somewhat different.

We from the WEMF were mainly interested in the usefulness of the method for media research, especially for printed media. In a first analysis, we found that the penetration levels of daily newspapers were clearly below the levels given by previous studies and that they also decreased over time.

	Consum Media Control			Comparative Studies	
	Jan.	Feb.	March	QMS	MTP
Base	315 %	323 %	341 %	1481 %	875 %
Berner Zeitung	24	23	20	47	47
Der Bund	12	13	11	28	21
Blick	7	6	5	20	21
Zurcher Zeitung	2	2	2	4	4

The Berner Zeitung in two comparative studies achieved a penetration of 47% in each case. In the test, they had 24% in January and in March 20%. This did not appear credible to us since 95% of the Swiss regional newspapers are sold by subscription and come into the household every day.

On a more exact analysis of the original data, it turned out that only half of the participants in the panel reported contact with the daily newspapers every day. This is not plausible either. Why should someone pay the subscription for a newspaper if he usually does not read it?

The results concerning the radio were similar:

Daily penetration on average working day...	CMC %	SRG study 1989 %
Radio DRS 1	27	59
Radio DRS 2	1	4
Radio DRS 3	6	14

The first programme of Radio DRS is a popular majority programme. According to permanent personal surveys, it has a daily penetration of 59%. The first analysis of the panel gave 27%. DRS 3 is a rock and pop station with a penetration of 14%. In the test it only reached 6% of listeners.

An analytical experiment

We put forward the hypothesis that a missing media entry did not necessarily mean that there was no contact but that the person questioned had possibly forgotten to enter this contact.

Entries per day

Media - Yes	1. Media consumption	2. Media	no contact? or entry forgotten?
- No	3. Consumption	4. No entry	
	Consumption : Yes	No	

If this was the case, then the missing entries would have been treated in the same way as people who refuse to answer in an ad hoc study. The difficulty was to keep separate the case when no contact took place and the case when the entry was forgotten.

It was thus assumed that media consumption was always reported when a consumption entry was made. The daily penetration of Radio DRS thus rose to 41% and that of DRS 3 to 10%. There was still a considerable difference to the comparative study but it was a great deal smaller.

Then the hypothesis was made that the media entry was always complete when a media contact was reported at all. Now the daily penetration of the radio stations agreed with the comparative study. Radio DRS 1 had a penetration of 59% and Radio DRS 3 14%.

Daily penetration on an average working day

	CMC active in sample	Media/ cons.	Media	SRG study
	%	%	%	%
Radio DRS 1	27	41	59	59
Radio DRS 2	1	2	2	4
Radio DRS 3	6	10	14	14

With the daily newspapers, the same phenomenon became apparent. The penetration rates agreed quite well with the two comparable parallel studies. The probable reason is that with a daily newspaper, the observed daily penetration matches the interval between issues.

Daily penetration on a working day in %

Year	CMC	Comparative Studies	
	1989	1989	1988
Base n =	126	1481	875
	%	%	%
Berner Zeitung	53	47	47
Der Bund	27	28	21
Blick	16	20	21
Zurcher Zeitung	4	5	4

For magazines which appear weekly, every fourteen days or even less frequently, we have still not succeeded in plausibly relating the data from the two studies. Up to now we have found no model to bridge the gap between the daily penetration and the interval between issues and to produce valid results.

With regard to the question of whether the panel could replace survey research on printed media, we were interested in what the unreliable reporting of media entries was based on.

The personal interviews at the end of the test showed that 52% of the participants listened to the same station at the same time every day. 95 % of daily newspapers are purchased by subscription in Switzerland and are usually consumed daily. Media consumption is thus highly ritualized and the panel participants do not see why they should report the same thing every day for months on end. This casts basic doubts on obtaining data on media use by means of a panel.

Today's shopping on the other hand is obviously different from yesterday's and therefore the readiness to report it is much greater.

Are the statistics on actual behaviour with daily newspapers better in the sense of "harder" than the much-abused K1 value which is based on the question concerning reading habits?

If reading is such a ritualized habit as the final interviews showed, the recording of actual behaviour in contrast to the traditional method of questioning provides no methodical gains.

In addition, there is another grave fault. Since those people who refuse to make an entry on the media differ from day to day, the observation of individual reading behaviour over time is not possible and thus one of the most important advantages of the panel is lost.

The attempt to analyse consumer behaviour and media consumption together had to be finally given up for two reasons. Firstly, there was no more money and, secondly, in the individual segments very small case figures would have accumulated. Thus the danger of coincidental results and the resulting misjudgments would have become too great. We therefore had no possibility of showing the relevance of planning with real data.

The test has shown that to obtain useable results the random survey has to be at least twice as big as originally assumed. The cost of a panel would thus increase to dimensions which could not be financed by the printing media, at least in the present recession.

Some of the shortcomings could certainly be removed. Examples are a shortened questioning time, better manuals and a simplified input of reading events which are always the same.

The test cost much more than half a million Swiss francs and you are perhaps also wondering whether this expenditure was justifiable. My answer is a clear yes.

Today, we know with considerable certainty from a practical field test what is to be expected from such a project and under what conditions and in which areas it could be successful.

At the beginning, I told you that I do not work in research. To round off, please let me express a personal thought from the point of view of the marketing man.

A cybernetic marketing system

When a consumer buys a product in a store, it is either a planned action because he needs it, or it is spontaneous because the neighbour has it as well, because it is cheap at the moment, because it has been advertised a great deal or simply because he stumbled over it in the store.

Perhaps he does not buy it because it was badly judged recently in a consumer test. Perhaps he buys a competitor's product because he cannot find the other one in the store or because he has mixed up the two brands.

The people in marketing try to influence these complicated and obscure decision-making processes by controlling a bundle of marketing measures to the best of their ability.

The marketing mix includes the product, the price, communication and distribution.

We are especially interested in communication and this has many levels. Most products are distributed by field representatives, sales promotion plays a part and public relations help to form the public image. Advertising is also multi-dimensional. It is only when a statement has been formulated and then formally designed that the advertisement or the commercial can be shown. Finally, the behaviour of other trading companies also plays a role and the competition can influence our measures positively or negatively.

This topic fills whole libraries and I do not claim to be able to present it comprehensively in 45 seconds. But I hope I have illustrated how risky it would be to reduce the complex weave that leads to the purchase of a product (or not) to the simple question of whether media contact has taken place or not.

MARKETING SYSTEM

