

THE AG. MA RESEARCH PROGRAM "VALIDATION OF THE READER PER ISSUE (AIR)": THE WAITING ROOM STUDY

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Pretest Results and Follow up Thoughts

Introduction

There are some interesting parallels between the democracy and the national readership survey system of the AG.MA in Germany:

- o a lot of criticism, especially concerning flexibility
- o the feeling that it is rather expensive
- o the principle "every vote counts equal" which is only modified by some weighting procedures after voting
- o the restrictedness of the voters memory
- o the increasing part of non-voters
- o but also the consensus of the majority of the members that it is the best of all bad regimes.

The last point is the basic one. And I think the AG.MA Research Program "Validation of the Reader per Issue" is an important effort to stabilize the above mentioned consensus by discussing and hopefully solving some more or less obvious problems of the "reader per issue (AIR)", the currency of the whole system.

The credibility of the currency is not based on its "truth" (except golden nuggets "gold standard") but on the fact that it represents the same value everywhere in its field of application and for each member in this field.

And this exactly is the background of the questions which are dealt with the "validation of the reader per issue" program.

For example: Has the AIR-unit really the same value for different titles? Do image factors inflate or deflate the value of the AIR-unit for certain titles? Do different reading patterns - in terms of place of reading, number of reading acts per copy, time spent by reading per copy, source of copy, parallel reading and replicated reading-result in different reliability of the interviewees answers?

These are only some aspects which could influence the quantity of the AIR-figures. There are also a lot of interesting questions with regard to the "quality" of the contact to a given copy (e.g. reading motivation, again intensity or time spent reading ...). But let's keep it simple at this point and confine ourselves to the validation program.

Circulation Data and Source of Copy

Our first and most obvious validation criterion is the "official" circulation data which is provided by the institution with the very german name "Informationsgemeinschaft zur Festlegung der Verbreitung von Werbeträgern": IVW.

Given the circulation figure and the measured AIR of the AG.MA survey we get a "number of readers per single copy" for each title which we name RPC

The following table 1 shows the different RPCs for titles of some comparatively homogeneous pairs of magazines. The type of questions we are interested in is: What makes the Playboy-Girls contacted by four boys per month whereas the Penthouse-Girls score only two? It is not the price. It is not the age of their lovers. Is it true at all? Have some Penthouse lovers forgotten the act? Are there Playboy contacts which were only imaginery?

Table 1

Title	Group	AIR	Sex		Structure of AIR				Education			Distribution		RPC	
			Male	Female	-29	30-49	50 +	Children < 14 in HH	Low	Mid-dle	High	Magazine sharing club, free copies etc.	Price in DM	Ind. (A = 100)	
		%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%				
A Stern	GI	15,1	53	47	29	38	34	24	40	33	26	20	4,00	6,2	100
B Bunte		8,9	39	61	20	29	51	19	57	30	13	27	4,00	5,4	87
A Hörzu	TV	18,6	48	52	25	30	45	21	50	32	18	3	2,10	3,1	100
B Hören + Sehen		13,3	47	53	27	33	40	24	60	29	11	2	2,10	2,6	84
A Frau im Spiegel	WM	4,5	18	82	15	28	58	18	68	26	7	17	2,30	3,4	100
B Echo der Frau		1,7	17	83	16	34	52	20	72	24	5	10	2,20	2,7	79
A Brigitte	WM	8,2	11	89	29	41	30	27	44	36	20	17	3,80	4,5	100
B Für Sie		5,3	12	88	22	40	38	26	51	35	14	20	3,80	3,7	82
A Tina	WM	7,9	18	82	24	35	41	13	67	28	5	1	2,10	2,9	100
B Bild der Frau		7,3	20	80	19	33	48	23	70	24	6	3	1,20	1,9	66
A Wiener	Trend	0,9	61	39	59	34	5	18	25	34	43	1	5,50	5,0	100
B Tempo		1,0	58	42	69	25	6	19	21	38	40	17	5,00	3,4	68
A Geo	HL	6,3	55	45	39	35	26	25	24	35	42	7	10,50	7,4	100
B Bild der Wissenschaft		1,2	60	40	33	38	27	25	18	28	55	20	10,00	5,0	68
C Spektrum		0,8	73	27	43	35	23	23	8	20	73	1	10,50	3,6	49
A Bild	PP	22,3	57	43	22	33	45	21	73	21	6	--	0,50	2,8	100
B other PP		4,3	55	45	25	36	39	21	57	29	13	--	1,00	2,1	75
A Playboy	MM	2,1	83	17	43	43	14	29	45	33	22	1	9,00	4,4	100
B Penthouse		0,8	83	17	45	43	13	25	35	38	28	8	9,00	2,4	55

GI = General Interest, TV = TV Guide, WM = Women's Magazine, Trend = Zeitgeist Magazine, HL = High Level/Academics, PP = Popular Paper, MM = Men's Magazine

Source: MA 92

The IVW-circulation data differentiates between subscription, newsstand circulation, magazine sharing club folders, copies from airport or airplane, and free copies. Thus the validation of the AIR can be divided in several part-validations if we are able to get valid source-of-copy informations by the readers.

So the Reader per Issue Validation Program * started by developing, testing and validating a source-of-copy-question. For validation purposes it was necessary to split into reading at home and out of home reading. So a kind of map can be drawn where you can see which region of the validation program I am speaking about regarding the study "reading acts out of home" and the "waiting room study".

"Source of copy map":

reading at home	1a	2a	3a	4		7a		
	self bought	bought by	subscription	maga- zine sharing club fol- der in hh		obtained/ given by		
reading out of home	(incl. free copies)	other members of the household (incl. free copies)	in house- hold	maga- zine sharing club folder at public places (waiting rooms, cafés, hairdres- sers)	in some other way available at public places (waiting rooms ...)	friends collea- gues, others	available/ circulated at work/ office/ canteen	airport, airplane
	1b	2b	3b	5	6	7b	8	9

Two studies were conducted in 1990 and 1991 to analyse the source of copy information delivered by a respectively completed AG.MA-questionnaire. Especially the validity of the report of self bought magazines was investigated by interviewing all household members, including the examination of all actual available copies in the household. Both projects are discussed elsewhere.

* This program was essentially designed by the research consultant Dr. Geiger.

Out-of-Home-Reading: A Provisional Framework of Quantities

For evaluating the relative importance of the out-of-home-sections 5,6 and 8 in the source-of-copy-map a telephone survey of out-of-home-reading-acts was conducted in late 1991.*

The main issue of this survey was a list of 29 reading places. For each place was asked:

- o magazines read in the last 12 months
- o frequency of magazine reading in the last 12 months
- o source of copy at the latest reading act
- o number of read copies at the latest reading act
- o reading time at the latest reading act.

All these questions were asked not for specific titles but for magazines in general.

The main result is given in the following table 2 (base: population 14 years and older):

	Maga- zine read in %	Ø-Fre- quency	Copy contacts at reading place (in mio)			
			Total	self bought/ brought along	found	both self bought and found
Place of work/office	20	104	2.522	692	1.112	718
Canteen/recess room in firm	6	77	966	217	523	225
University/school/library	7	31	637	33	452	151
+ Hairdresser	32	7	587	6	575	5
Transportation to/from work/office	6	63	582	502	12	68
+ Waiting room of a general practitioner	73	5	446	4	435	7
At friends, neighbours ...	27	16	438	2	371	65
Travelling in the railway	19	10	352	309	39	4
In the barracks	2	105	200	84	65	53
Travelling in hotels	25	5	187	60	67	60
Swimming pool, sauna, fitness centre	10	15	182	44	93	45
+ Restaurant, café	12	16	163	7	131	25
Travelling: at the beach	20	6	151	139	5	7
In hospital as a patient	19	4	140	77	18	45
+ Waiting room of a dentist	64	2	136	2	132	2
In the club (house)	6	16	94	5	45	45
Travelling in a car (passenger)	13	6	77	66	6	5
Travelling in the airplane	20	3	63	18	36	10
At a car dealer/service station	5	12	52	1	32	20
Other reading places			431	183	194	55
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All out-of-home-reading places	93		8.582	2.452	4.513	1.615

There are places with broad audience but low frequency (waiting rooms of doctors, hairdressers) and places with smaller audiences but high frequency (office, canteen, university/school/library, transportation to/from work).

In total the number of out-of-home-contacts with magazines (about one contact per adult in two days) seems to be very high even if we had to concede that especially the figures of high frequency places may be over estimated (due to specialist periodicals at work place and wrong generalization of the "normal" run of a work day).

About two third of the out-of-home-contacts are with found copies. From these found copies again four out of ten are read at work, in the office, in the canteen or on the way to or from work. Another fourth of the found copies is read in waiting rooms of doctors, at hairdresser's salons and in restaurants and cafes.

Determining the Number of Readers per Single Copy: The Waiting Room Study as a First Step

So the next step in the validation program, part "out of home reading", is to look which titles are read at the specific places and whether these places can contribute to the titles' reach in a relevant proportion. For this purpose a project design was developed to collect the respective data (based on the recency questions in the AG.MA questionnaire which are completed for the maximum readership of each title by questions of place of reading and both source of copy and reading time per each mentioned reading place).

It is a point of view for whom the torture is more cruel: for the interviewer or for the interviewee. We shall be obliged to reduce the number of titles for which these questions are asked so that we hope to realize an average interview length of one hour. The AG.MA as well as the project designer and the institute know that you can't conclude the true titles' reach for the different reading places from the results of this survey.

But we confidently hope that we get detailed information

- o which titles are really read at which reading places,
- o whether the respective copies are owned by the reader or not (only the latter are interesting for the validation of out-of-home reading),
- o and which reading places of not owned copies are really relevant regarding the total reach of the specific titles.

So the main result of this project will be a list of reading places each completed by a hopefully small list of titles for which the true number of readers per single copy (RPC) has to be determined.

This next step - determining the true number of RPC per title and reading place - can not be done with the same research method for the places with big audience but low frequency (e.g. doctor's waiting room, cafe) and for the places with smaller audience but high frequency (e.g. office, canteen).

As a feasibility study for the big-audience-low-frequency type of reading place we conducted in late 91 a pretest which we name "waiting room study". The purpose was two fold:

- 1) can we in this way establish precise enough RPC figures for single copies in doctor's waiting rooms, hairdresser's salons and cafes ?
- 2) are we right to suppose a relevant unterclaiming of reading acts at these places in the "normal" AG.MA interview which results in an underestimated AIR for the respective titles? (If this supposition would come out as false all the expenditure at this point would be useless).

The test design can be briefly described as follows: A participant observation of readers was organized in two doctor's practices, in a cafe, in an inn, and in two hairdressers's salons. At all these places magazines were available, most of them from magazine sharing club folders. *

* In Germany the magazine sharing club folder has a special importance: There are about 300 companies in that business. Each week new folders come into circulation that means in private households, practices of doctors, law offices, cafes hairdresser's salons etc. A folder contains 7 to 11 magazines (weeklies, fortnightlies, monthlies). The reach is 22 % of the population per week, the maximum readership is about two third of the population.

Two interviewers formed a team for each observation place:

The one had to observe readers of the available magazines in 10 "observation segments" of 2 hours each that were randomly distributed within the business hours of the place. He had to record all reading acts concerning public available magazines, reading time per copy, intensity of reading, name and issue number of the read copy, the source of this copy (magazine sharing club folder/subscribed by the owner of the place/single bought copy/other), sex and estimated age of the reader of each copy. In addition a general description of the place (business hours, number of places, number of observable places) had to be given and be completed by a full list of all available copies in the run of each observation period. Finally this interviewer had to recruit at the end of each observation segment a reader of a identified magazine for a follow up interview within the publication intervall of the observed title. For recruiting no reference was allowed to magazines, reading and so on.

The other interviewer got the address of the pre-recruited out-of-home-reader and conducted a normal AG.MA-interview within the publication intervall, without refering ever to the observed reading place. Thus the observed title should have be mentioned in the recency question for the AIR.

At the six places 316 reading acts of 23 different titles were observed in all together 122 hours. 36 follow up interviews were conducted. We got three main results:

- o **The method works:** There are neither insurmountable difficulties to manage cooperation with the doctors, the innkeeper or the hairdresser, nor to define a observable amout of available copies and record the reading acts of these copies, and to recruit readers for a follow up interview.
- o So it seems to **be able to establish a reasonable projection** for estimating the RPC of each copy. In this pilot we got an average RPC of 11 per publishing intervall which is much higher as was to be expected. Together with the considerable average reading time this emphasizes the importance of this out-of-home-reading-segment.
- o Only one out of two titles of which the reading was observed were reported in the AG.MA interview to be read in the last publishing intervall. One third was not even reported in the maximum readership. Taking into consideration that these figures indicate only the theoretical minimum of the underclaiming I think inspite of the small base of interviews it is evident that **underclaiming of reading acts** at the observed places is a relevant problem regarding the AIR figures of titles with a high share of circulation in magazine sharing club folders.

Follow-up Thoughts

So: What are the consequences?

In my opinion the AG.MA would be well advised to act like a real democracy:

- o If there are problems they should be discussed and analyzed in public. They must not be veiled with regard to strong pressure groups or because some are warning this might shake the system to its very foundation. And also the AG.MA and its financial backers should be **flexible** and daring enough, not to filibuster but to continue and accelerate the research program "Validation of the Reader per issue (AIR)". Even if the **cost** will not be low and what is more not exactly foreseeable.
- o The principle "**every vote counts equal**" must not be "qualified": if there are contacts, if there is media exposure, the AG.MA survey should count it wherever it takes place and whatever theories about the advertising value of the respective contacts are conceived.

- o **Don't speculate on the restrictedness of the voter's memory** but help them to vote as deliberate as possible. It's not much help to expand the AG.MA questionnaire even more by adding source of copy questions, place of reading questions and so on. Cut down the number of titles, allow your interviewee to focus on one media category (e.g. dailies or the different kinds of magazines) and he will deliver more valid reach data. And you will get even more precise and valid data if you build in the information obtained in such special approaches that are represented by the waiting room study.

- o This concept will also **counteract the increasing of non voters**. I think this point cannot be overemphasized. Again a parallel can be drawn between AG.MA and democracy: It's legitimacy corresponds to the percentage of voting. (But also note: an extraordinary high percentage of voting in general indicates rigging!).

