

1.2 Magazine audience measurement in the United States – a brief history and review of current methods

INTRODUCTION

This paper is intended to provide a brief history of magazine audience research as practised in the United States as well as an accurate description of audience measurement methods as currently practised there. It is hoped that this may serve as a frame of reference for the many papers that will follow in this symposium which treat specific issues in more detail than is possible here.

This history of magazine research in the US will not be reported in a simple, chronological fashion here. This is, in part, because of the unique nature of magazine research in the US and in part due to a bias on the part of the author towards dealing with issues rather than with sequences.

This format of this paper, then, will be to begin with a very brief look at magazine audience measurement in the US as it existed in 1950 and then to follow its development along several parallel and simultaneous paths to the present. Current practices will then be described in some detail.

A BRIEF HISTORY

A history of magazine audience measurement research, in order to remain brief, must of necessity be more journalistic than scholarly in nature. This implies a certain subjectivity, and imposition of order upon, if not chaos, at least moderate confusion. Moreover, it precludes comprehensiveness in favour of clarity. In short, the history recounted here is not 'the history' so much as 'a history' – or even 'the author's history'.

Nor is the bibliography appended here to be considered exhaustive. It includes only those references considered to be seminal in nature and clearly related to the issues here addressed. The complete references available within ARF's archives alone more than fill two filing cabinets and a large closet. Those who may be interested in detailed investigations into any of the matters touched on here are invited to avail themselves of the ARF's resources when in New York.

Audience measurement before 1950

Magazine audience measurement in the United States really got started by chance occurrence. In 1936, *Life* discovered that several of its issues were selling out almost as fast as they reached the news-stands. Persons

who wished to read these scarce issues were therefore forced to beg, borrow, or steal them from purchasers. It followed, then, that circulation figures *per se* were unable to capture the *real* audience of *Life*, an audience which represented, it was hoped, a significant bonus for advertisers. It was Cornelius DuBois (*Life's* Research Director), who dreamed up the term 'audience'. The first report, in 1938, says, "the term 'audience' is used for convenience, . . . since there were no philologists on the committee, it was decided that it was better to use the familiar word 'audience', than to try to create a visual equivalent." Almost everywhere else in the world the term 'readership' is used, as in this symposium. That word had already been pre-empted in the US for measuring the extent of *editorial* readership: per cent 'seen', 'read some', 'read most'.

Life brought together a team of researchers probably unequalled before or since – Paul Lazarsfeld, Elmo Roper, Raymond Franzen, Archibald Crossley, Darrell Lucas. They set out to survey the total population to determine who had seen a specific issue of *Life*. In order to do this, interviewers showed respondents a particular issue, took them through it page by page, and asked them if they had read key articles. Thus was born the through-the-book method.

Early on, questions were raised regarding 'prestige effect' – that is, whether people might claim to have read a given issue which in fact they had not – either because they felt they should have (in the case of regular readers) or because they wanted to be thought of as a *Life* reader (in the case of social-climbers). In order to correct for this possibility, a 'confusion control' was introduced. A subsample of respondents were interviewed with respect to an issue which they *could not have read*, a prepublication issue, and the proportion of persons claiming to have read this issue was subtracted from those claiming to have read the published issue. This practice became the rule in subsequent audience research despite the fact that such over-claiming tended to be relatively insignificant (about 2%).

Despite the fact that this seminal work was guided by the conviction that the actual audience of a magazine was greater than that represented by its circulation, it should be noted that at the beginning and well into the 1950s, the goal of audience measurement research was to identify *real readers* of a publication. The mere claim of having read a given publication was not sufficient: in order to be counted as a reader, a respondent had to

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claim to have read (or later, at least to have seen) at least one specific editorial item. Indeed, some studies of the 40s set even more stringent requirements for readership: having read three or more editorial items for example, or claiming to have read a greater number of items from a published issue than from an unpublished issue.

Life's "Continuing Study of Magazine Audiences", as this series of studies came to be known, refined the through-the-book method over the years 1938-1947. The 'confusion control' was the first feature to be eliminated, and with it the definition of readership began a gradual evolution which continues to this day. In order to implement the 'confusion control', it was necessary to have access to an adequate number of prepublication issues of the magazine. This was logistically problematical for a weekly and, to the extent that one might wish to measure competitors as well, administratively difficult for multi-title studies.

In 1940, Louise McCarthy, a researcher at *Life*, suggested a modification of the through-the-book procedure with an eye to streamlining the implementation of these studies. What she recommended, and what was subsequently adopted in 1946, became known as the 'editorial-interest' technique. In this procedure, respondents were taken through an issue of a magazine and their attention was directed to key editorial items with the question, "does this item look interesting?" After going through the key items, the respondent was asked, almost as a throw-away, "just to keep the record straight, are you sure you have (haven't) seen this issue before, or aren't you certain about it?" It was hoped that this 'editorial interest' technique could remove the prestige bias while remaining issue-specific and providing maximal aids to recall. Comparison of the audience levels produced by this technique versus those produced using the 'confusion-control' technique showed little differences. Thus, the more easily implemented editorial-interest method became the rule and forms the basis for the through-the-book method as used today.

It should be noted here that despite the similarity in audience levels produced by these two techniques, a small but significant change in reader definition had occurred. Where the 'confusion-control' method had required respondents to demonstrate that they had 'seen or read' specific editorial items from the test issue, the 'editorial-interest' method used the editorial items not as criteria but merely as mnemonic aids. The readership criterion now was whether the respondent claimed to have *seen the issue* before. Though it was not perceived as such at the time, in retrospect we can see the beginnings of a loosening of readership definition to include as part of the audience persons who claim to have seen an issue but who have not demonstrated having seen any particular editorial item in that issue.

Nevertheless, the intent at the time was to count only true readers as part of a magazine's audience. This was true even in the rare recall studies conducted at the time, which employed unaided recall as their measure of readership with no prelisting of titles.

This commitment to determining the true levels of magazine readership is also evident in *Life's* decision to employ a probability sample in its 1950 study of audience accumulation. Alfred Politz had been commissioned to execute this study and had argued persuasively in favour of the use of a true probability sample. This represented a departure from the quota sampling which had been employed in previous studies, and Politz' recommendation was accompanied by a cautionary note. Though the feasibility of a probability sample had been demonstrated by Politz the previous year in a study of 11 Canadian magazines (conducted under consultation by the ARF and CARF), *Life's* audience was likely to be smaller when a probability sample was employed than had been the case previously. Despite this warning, *Life* conducted the study and did, indeed, find itself with a smaller audience. However, greater precision created by this sampling technique resulted in enhanced credibility for Alfred Politz, and his sampling expert, W R Simmons.

The winds of change

The title of this section is a bit misleading. Even during the relatively stable years between 1938 and 1950, change was the rule for the field of magazine audience measurement. But there had been relatively little controversy over methodology during that period. Through-the-book was the only widely accepted measurement instrument. It had been refined first by the editorial-interest technique, then by probability sampling, and finally by the use of multiple interviews (three in Politz's 1950 study, two thereafter) in order to establish reach and frequency information. But each of these changes was generally accepted as being for the better.

But though at that time there was little of the sort of heated debate which characterises the current US scene, the industry remained dissatisfied, particularly the agencies. You see, nearly all of the studies conducted to this time were studies of very small numbers of magazines – and often of only one. Politz' study of nine magazines in 1953 was heralded as something of a breakthrough.

As more magazines began to be included in the interviews, additional methodological questions began to be raised. Is the method equally applicable to weeklies and monthlies, for example? For heavily texted magazines versus pictorial magazines? Simultaneously, some researchers began to question the use of total audience figures as the sole purchase criterion. Is not the quality of reading relevant?

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Many of these concerns came to a head when *Reader's Digest* was about to accept advertising in 1950. In order to be competitive with *Life* and *Look*, the *Digest* needed comparable audience data. But it was a monthly, and they were weeklies. Moreover, the *Digest* was primarily text, not pictorial, and many of its articles had previously appeared elsewhere. Politz was hired to determine first, whether the through-the-book method was able to identify *Digest* readers accurately, and second, what sort of modifications to the normal through-the-book technique would be required in order to fairly compare weeklies and monthlies.

The first of these objectives was addressed in a pilot study. Politz found that respondents were as able to report readership or nonreadership of the *Digest* when they were shown pages in the normal manner as they were when they actually took the time to read a bit of each article.

The second objective was a bit trickier but has had immense repercussions ever since.

The through-the-book technique always used 'aged' issues as stimuli, not current issues. The assumption had been that it takes some time before a magazine accumulates its total audience: not every one reads an issue in the week in which it is published. Since most publications tested up to this time had been weeklies, issue age had not seemed to be a key variable – three to five weeks had seemed to be a reasonable rule of thumb. But might not a monthly accumulate its audience over a longer period of time? And even for weeklies, was the 'rule of thumb' good enough?

To answer these concerns, Politz added a 'reading-days' question to the design and conducted interviews for a given issue over a long period of time. He was able, as a result, to estimate accumulation rates for weeklies and monthlies separately. He found that weekly audiences tend to accumulate faster than those for monthlies, but also to reach an asymptotic level sooner. On average, a weekly achieves its total audience in about five weeks; a monthly, in about 11 weeks. All subsequent through-the-book testing in the US, including the 1981 SMRB survey, has therefore used as stimuli weeklies which are four–five weeks old and monthlies which are 10–12 weeks old.

This introduction of a novel measure – reading days – spurred two parallel lines of experimentation. One had to do with the investigation of other indices of the effectiveness of a given magazine as an advertising vehicle; the other had to do with increasing the number of magazines tested in a single study.

Three alternate measures to total audience were looked at very seriously over the next several years. In 1957 *Life* produced a study of consumer expenditures which related magazine audiences to product sales

based on purchase diaries maintained by the respondents. Though the interrelating of readership and buying behaviour did not catch on immediately, it has come to be an essential part of magazine research in the 80s.

The second effectiveness measure was more direct: ad-page exposure. The *Saturday Evening Post* sponsored the first of these. Respondents were asked to recall their page-opening behaviour from the day before. It is found that their reported behaviour understated their actual behaviour (measured by the glue-spot technique) by less than 5%. Further research in this area, also by the *Post*, determined that a second exposure to a given page delivers 80% of the effectiveness (in terms of attitude toward and awareness of the product advertised) of the first exposure. Ad-age exposure showed great promise, but was to be eclipsed by the trend toward larger studies developing at the same time.

Finally, *McCalls* conducted a study of the effects of the editorial environment on effectiveness. This study showed that such effects do exist and suggested that further research in this area could be fruitful. But, as with ad-page exposure, it was never fully tested or developed.

Up to this time, all audience research had been custom designed and sponsored by one or two magazines. Agencies and advertisers began to express some discomfort. Magazines often were measured one year but not the next. The array of magazines in a given study was determined by the sponsor's perception of his competitive frame, not by the agencies. And despite the inclusion in the best of these studies of internal validity checks, questions began to be raised about the objectivity of the research.

In 1958, the ARF presented a proposal to the industry to measure the audiences of 35 magazines simultaneously. It was an ambitious undertaking for that time, but in order to measure such a large number of magazines in a single study, certain compromises were necessary. For example, it was felt that using full issues of 35 magazines would have an intimidating effect upon interviewer and interviewee alike. Pre-testing showed that the use of 'skeletonised' issues consisting only of the first page of 12 key editorial items produced audience levels nearly identical to those produced using full issues. The inclusion of ad-page exposure, product information, or testing of ads was considered out of the question.

The ARF study never happened. It is not clear whether this was due to an inability to raise all the necessary funds or to the objections of certain key publications (and ARF members), but the ARF files were open and made available to the industry. The AC Nielsen Company launched a study based on the ARF design but again for reasons lost in the haze of antiquity, it was not continued. Politz was asked to field such a study, but declined, arguing that the compromises required by the

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magnitude of the undertaking (use of skeletonised issues, loss of richness in the effectiveness data) were not worth the gains.

In 1962, W R Simmons, formerly Politz' sampling expert, launched the first through-the-book syndicated survey of magazine audience. Simmons' studies have been conducted annually ever since, though his company was eventually sold and renamed SMRB.

Although interest in ad-page exposure, reading days, editorial environment waned, a need was still felt for product information. In 1963 Norton Garfinkel launched the Brand Rating Index (BRI) which accumulated a vast amount of product information along with readership information. The audience data was relatively unsatisfying to US researchers, relying on aided recall of having read pre-listed magazines, but it was for several years the key source of product information related to claimed readership. In 1970, BRI attempted to shift to the through-the-book method, encountered problems and was heard from no more. SRDS briefly got into the magazine audience wars, also providing product information, and using magazine covers and tables of contents as cues to recall. SRDS also attempted to relate audiences of magazines, television, radio and newspapers. Apparently, they bit off more than the industry could chew and disbanded the effort after three years.

Starch and the legendary Politz made forays into total audience syndicated research in the 60s, but neither was able to compete successfully with Simmons. Starch lived to fight another day, as we will see. Politz faded from the scene, the legend untarnished.

Probably the most spectacular event in the later history of magazine audience research in the US was the invasion of the Timothy Joyce juggernaut in 1972. Joyce was imported by J Walter Thompson to head up Axiom Marketing Research and adapt the British TGI to the US market. For the first time, recent reading achieved a modicum of respectability in the US, in large part because of the inclusion of substantial amounts of product information and because TGI measured a much larger number of magazines than did Simmons. Sales of TGI's product usage data were quite brisk, indeed, but TGI was never the roaring success Thompson had expected.

This was for several reasons. First, Simmons began to collect product data via a leave-behind booklet between their two readership interviews. Second, US researchers were sceptical of the accuracy of a self-administered technique which used only magazine names as cues to recall. Third, Simmons was able to provide empirically-based reach and frequency information derived from their two-interview system.

In 1978, Simmons and TGI merged to form SMRB, and Joyce returned to England. In merging of the companies, SMRB also merged the techniques. In 1979, 40

magazines were measured by the through-the-book method and 100 additional, smaller magazines were measured by a personally-administered version of the recent-reading method. The industry was assured that the combination of these techniques in a single study should not result in any undue concern. The industry was sceptical and called upon the ARF to investigate the comparability of these two methods.

Quite unexpectedly, Timothy Joyce returned and established Mediamark Research Inc. MRI conducted a personal-interview recent-reading study of 165 magazines and published its findings a few weeks after SMRB in the Fall of 1979.

The industry was thrown into chaos. Both SMRB and MRI reported total audience via the recent-reading method which were nearly double what had ever been seen before, either in the old Simmons through-the-book studies or in the TGI study. The ARF data confirmed this finding as well as the observation that through-the-book audiences had *not* changed substantially as a result of introducing the recent-reading measurement in the same interview.

The details of these events and what has transpired since will be discussed at greater length in subsequent sessions, so we will not go into them here. But several observations do seem to flow out of the history recounted up to this point.

First, the definition of a reader has loosened over time. It is no longer necessary to demonstrate that one has read a specific article within a specific magazine. Nor is it necessary to even *claim* to have read the magazine. It is now sufficient to claim to have 'read or looked into' a magazine. That is, one need not have purchased, borrowed, or even held the magazine to be included in its audience. Indeed, one need not even be literate.

Second, the number of magazines measured in a single interview has reached enormous proportions due to the large number of magazines published in the US. The inclusion of more and more magazines in these studies must have an effect on the audience levels produced. An analysis of a study conducted in 1974 using only ten magazines measured through-the-book showed substantial order effects even for this short list. Rotation or randomisation of order can distribute these effects evenly, but cannot eliminate them.

Third, the validity of none of the measurement methods used has been established. Indeed, it is questionable whether validity may ever be established given a readership definition which is so loose as to include even a casual glance over the shoulder of a fellow straphanger on the IRT subway.

Fourth, there has been a silent partner in all this: television. Magazine audience numbers are used to compete not simply for advertising dollars allocated to print,

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but for television dollars as well. Television provides large audiences based on measures of exposure to the advertising vehicle (programme), not upon viewership. Indeed, Timothy Joyce has cited this fact explicitly as a reason why recent-reading numbers, in the long run, are more useful to publishers than through-the-book numbers. They provide an exposure measure for magazines comparable, he says, to that for television programmes.

Thus, in the US we appear to have moved away from measuring readership *per se* to measuring audience, in the broadcast sense of the term.

CURRENT PRACTICES IN THE USA

In the United States, we believe that even the pursuit of truth benefits from competition. As a result, the US now has two services which provide magazine audience data with a third waiting in the wings: Mediamark Research, Inc, using a recent reading method; Simmons Market Research Bureau using both the through-the-book and recent-reading techniques; and Starch, INRA, Hooper, promising the introduction of a 'new', issue-specific measurement technique, respectively.

Mediamark Research Inc (MRI)

Let us look at MRI methods first. MRI employs what is described as an "improved 'recent reading' approach for measuring magazine audiences". The term 'improvement', it is to be assumed, is applied with regard to the old US version of TGI. The 'improvements' include: the use of personal interviews, versus a self-administered questionnaire, for the magazine readership data collection; the collection of readership information prior to product information; the use of logo-cards as mnemonic aids; the inclusion of claimed place of reading, 'reader quality', and claimed-reading frequency questions.

THE SAMPLE

MRI employs a stratified probability sample of 15,000 adults per wave with two waves per year. (It is expected that in 1981, the sample size will be reduced to 10,000 per wave to allow for more frequent acquisition of product information.) The sampling frame is drawn from a computer file of all US households with either an automobile or a listed telephone (90% of all US households) supplemented by households found during fieldwork to be between listed households in the sample clusters. Households were pre-selected from the top nine US markets plus St Louis and from among 172 counties selected as PSU's throughout the rest of the US; sex of respondent was also predetermined and no substituting was allowed. Then higher-income groups (top 25%) and major markets were over-sampled. All clusters are

changed from wave-to-wave, and response rate hovers at about 70%.

THE INTERVIEW

The MRI procedure establishes, by logo-card sorting, whether each magazine was read by the respondent within the most recent publication interval: ie seven days for a weekly, 30 days for a monthly, and so on. This is done in two steps: First, a 'six-month screen' sort to screen in those titles which could have been read in the last six months; second, a detailed 'time' sort to establish when each screened-in title was last read. The first step involves sorting all 150 or so cards in a complete deck of logo cards. The second step involves re-sorting, on average, some 12-15 titles per respondent. In detail, the steps are: Firstly, the respondent is shown the deck of logo cards, which is shuffled in front of him so that it is in random sequence and is also seen to be random. He is also shown a sorting board which is explained to him. This has three positions on it: SURE HAVE, NOT SURE, AND SURE HAVE NOT. Above these positions is printed the question, "Have you read or looked into any of these publications in the last six months?" and the remainder "Any copy: anywhere: any reading or looking into." These are all explained to the respondent, who then sorts the cards accordingly. This first sort usually takes some five to six minutes.

Secondly, the SURE HAVE NOT cards are put on one side. The SURE HAVE and NOT SURE cards are shuffled together and then put in piles according to publication frequency (weeklies, monthlies, etc). The cards state this frequency (eg 'published weekly'). The respondent is now asked to resort the screened-in cards on a board for each different frequency which is the same in design as the first sorting board, with the same three sorting positions, except that the question now asks about reading within the publication interval. For example, the question for weeklies is "Did you happen to read or look into any of these publications in the last week, that is, the seven days since last . . . day, not including today?" Interviewers are instructed to state the starting *day* or *date* for each publication interval, and to write these on the questionnaire so that a check can be made that this has been done and done correctly.

After each pile of screen-in cards has been resorted, the respondent is asked to read out the titles in each board position while the interviewer marks the responses on the questionnaire. Those who indicate that they SURE HAVE read a title in its most recent publication interval are counted as READERS of the magazine concerned.

In addition to providing total audience measurement, MRI provides a number of qualitative measures which are very useful for evaluating magazines, and which can be used for weighting purposes in connection

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with specific campaign objectives. These measures are: place of reading; reading days; reading time; reader actions (such as sending for a product or for information, use of coupons, recipes, etc); and reader attitudes (to the magazines overall and the advertising in them).

In addition, MRI interviewers place an 81-page product information and broadcast media booklet with each respondent, to be mailed back (call-backs are contemplated for 1981 to boost response rate beyond its current 60% of respondents). This booklet provides detailed, brand-by-brand usage information concerning the use of mail-order catalogues and broadcast media usage.

REPORTING

MRI provides audience reports every six months which include 12 month rolling averages for each magazine in the survey. Product data will be reported annually.

In addition to providing total audience, readers per copy, and audience demographics for each magazine, MRI is able to provide reach and frequency data. Moreover, the data from the leave-behind booklet, when published, is related to magazine readership, thereby providing magazine by product, by other media, by demographics, information useful to media and market planners alike.

Moreover, all this data plus the 'quality-of-readership' data is available respondent-by-respondent via computer tapes. Thus subscribers have the opportunity to perform custom analyses of the data which go beyond those provided in the formal MRI report.

Simmons Market Research Bureau (SMRB)

As mentioned earlier, SMRB employs a 'mixed-method' approach to magazine audience measurement. About 40 magazines are measured via a variation of the through-the-book technique, another 100 or so via a recent-reading technique similar to that employed by MRI.

THE SAMPLE

SMRB, too, employs an area probability sample stratified by geographic area and by income households within large clusters are prelisted and randomly selected for the sample. The half-open interval is used to pick up unlisted households. Males and females are sampled separately and substitutions are not permitted. SMRB reports annually, based upon a sample of approximately 15,000 adults. Response rate is about 75%.

THE INTERVIEW(S)

Actually, SMRB employs two interviews per respondent, separated in time by about a month in order to provide empirically-derived estimates of reach and frequency (turnover and duplication). Each interview is conducted

identically (except as noted) and a product/other media booklet is left at the end of the first interview to be filled out by the respondent and picked up at the time of the second interview. Approximately 80% of the respondents complete the second interview, nearly all of them having also completed the booklet.

After several initial questions to establish the qualifications of the respondent, the interviewer launches into questioning regarding newspaper reading behaviour for selected newspapers. The magazines readership portion of the interview follows.

For the 1979 and 1980 SMRB studies, respondents were then shown a 'logo-book'. This was a loose-leaf binder with glossine pages containing three near-lifesize, full colour magazine logos. The respondents were asked to indicate which of these magazines they "might have read or looked into during the last six months". Their answers were recorded and served as the screening data for the through-the-book measurement to follow (order was, of course, rotated across respondents).

Before beginning the through-the-book readership questioning, however, the respondents were asked to sort 100 full colour logo cards into two piles: those they "might have read or looked into during the last six months" and those they were "sure they had (hadn't) read or looked into during the last six months." These answers were recorded and served as the screening data for the recent-reading measurement. Cards are shuffled between interviews to randomise order effect. (For 1981, the card sort serves as the screening procedure for *both* methods.)

Respondents were then questioned via the recent-reading method about the magazines read or looked into in the past six months. They were asked, for each magazine, whether they had read or looked into any issue of that magazine in the last month (for monthlies). (In 1979 and 1980, only monthlies were measured via recent-reading; in 1981, some weeklies and bi-weeklies will also be included and the question adjusted accordingly.) They were also asked to indicate, for each magazine read, where they had read it and whether they "usually read or look into less than one, one, two, three, or four out of every four (issues) published.

The interview then proceeded to the through-the-book phase. For each of the magazines on which the respondent had screened-in via the logo-book, they were shown a skeletonised issue of a specific, aged issue of that magazine. The interviewer turned the pages and asked the respondent to indicate any "article or feature that looks especially interesting to you." This served solely as a mnemonic aid. The respondent was then asked whether "this is the first time you happened to see this particular issue, or have you read or looked into it before?" This is the readership question. Only those who

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testify they *surely* looked into or read the issue are tabulated as members of the audience. Place of reading and frequency of reading were also ascertained for each magazine read or looked into. After asking additional classification (demographic) questions of each respondent, a product booklet was placed with the respondent to be filled out privately prior to a second interview.

About a month later, the product booklet was picked up and a second interview conducted. This second interview was identical to the first, with two exceptions: respondents were considered already 'screened-in' for magazines 'read' according to the first interview; no demographic information was solicited.

REPORTING

Audience data for the magazines measured by the through-the-book method were reported in the normal way. Recent-reading audiences, however, were adjusted downward in both 1979 and 1980 to make them more comparable to the through-the-book audiences. In 1979 this was accomplished by not counting as readers persons who claimed to read fewer than two out of every four issues on average. For 1980 (and 1981), a 'calibrated frequency' method was employed whereby persons *screening-in* via the logo-cards were differentially weighted as to their probability of being an actual reader based upon ratios derived from, but not endorsed by the ARF in its Comparability Study. The details of this method of calibration will be discussed at greater length later in the symposium.

The data were reported much as for MRI, including demographics, product usage, and other-media usage. The notable exception is that SMRB's reach and frequency estimates are empirically derived from a binomial expansion of the two-interview data, not by the use of an algorithm applied to the claimed frequency of reading data.

Starch-INRA-Hooper (Starch)

Although SMRB and, more recently, MRI have dominated the US magazine audience measurement scene, a third actor is considering entering the drama -- Starch. Since this service is now only contemplated, a brief summary of its unique features is sufficient.

Starch proposes, after screening via the now universal logo card sort, to ascertain readership of *all* magazines by showing respondents full colour covers and tables of contents of aged issues. The hope is to remain issue-specific (rather than time-specific) and provide a uniform methodology for all magazines. Covers and tables of contents are assured to be less fatiguing for respondents and interviewer alike than are skeletonised issues, while providing better cues to recall than does the recent-reading method. Marketing information will also

be gathered via a leave-behind booklet, one which would be more streamlined than those employed by the other two services. Finally, teenagers (12-17) would also be included in the study, as would measures of primary readership and frequency of reading.

The viability of this method is yet to be determined.

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Note: This list was compiled in order to provide more details concerning some of the issues addressed in this paper. It is in no way intended to be exhaustive, nor does it include references to issues not explicitly raised here. It may, however, provide a starting point for those who wish to investigate these matters in greater depth than was possible here. Copies are available for study at ARF Information Services.

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