

3.2 Experiments with filter questions in Finland

INTRODUCTION

During the 70s there were two major experiments within the Finnish NRS to improve the filter questions in use. The first experiment was carried out in 1972. The idea came from the filter question that was in use in the NRS in the UK. The results were positive and the change of filter question resulted in a more acceptable level of readership figures than was produced earlier.

The second experiment was carried out in 1977 and the objective was to compare the number of readers produced by the German filter and frequency questions with the Finnish figures. The results show less difference than was expected and no decisions were made to change the questions in use in Finland.

THE CHANGE OF FILTER

For some peculiar reason the filter in use until 1971 was six months for all publications. A daily newspaper as much as a monthly magazine passed the filter if reading had happened within the last six months.

Secondly the black and white masthead cards with the information on issue periods for each publication were in one pile, shuffled up for each interview. So the first publication could be a monthly, the second a daily, and so on.

An experiment was then carried out in order to make the filter period equivalent of six issue periods of each

publication: six days for a daily, six weeks for a weekly and so on.

At the same time, in another experiment, the masthead cards were grouped into four piles (dailies, weeklies, fortnightlies and monthlies) and a rotation of three alternatives was introduced, with dailies always the last pile.

The results of both experiments were very promising and the new filter and grouping of masthead cards were introduced in the NRS in 1973. The change produced considerably lower readership levels for weeklies, while monthlies had only a slight reduction. The difference between the two readership measures – frequency scale and last issue period readers – was decreased as can be seen in **Table 1**.

THE 1977 EXPERIMENT WITH THE GERMAN FILTER

In 1977 an experiment with different types of filter questions was carried out on a national omnibus survey, two separate samples of 1000 individuals being used. The object of the experiment was to test the German filter question against the one used in Finland. There was a general belief that our filter let through too many infrequent readers because of our precoded filter periods in the questionnaire. We hoped that the German approach would bring a solution to our problem.

Our filter consisted of only one question. We asked whether the respondent had read or looked through weeklies within the last six weeks; fortnightlies within the last three months; and monthlies within the last six months.

All those having read the magazine during this filter period proceeded to the frequency question.

The German filter was based on two questions:

- (a) whether the respondent has heard the name of the magazine or read or looked at it.
- (b) how long ago did she last read or look at it:
 - (i) during the filter period as above?
 - (ii) twice the filter period as above?
 - (iii) longer ago?

If read or looked within the above mentioned filter period the reading frequency is asked.

The results of the experiment can be seen in **Tables 2–4**. The differences between figures reached by the Finnish and the German questions are very small. The German approach produced for monthlies slightly higher

TABLE 1
Share of last issue period readers in different frequency claims

Frequency claims	1/6	2/6	3/6	4/6	5/6	6/6
Expected	.17	.33	.50	.67	.83	1.00
Monthlies						
1971	.70	.82	.90	.92	.91	.98
1973	.38	.53	.64	.73	.75	.94
UK 1972	.33	.43	.55	.65	.74	.88
Weeklies						
1971	.32	.37	.52	.62	.69	.92
1973	.26	.37	.52	.57	.66	.93

TABLE 2
Experiment with filter questions – monthlies

	Read within filter period		0/6	1/6	Frequency					6/6	Readers	Coverage	Difference
	<i>n</i>	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	<i>n</i>	%		
(1) Finnish filter question (<i>n</i> = 1071)													
Avotakka	424	40	2	23	27	13	8	5	21	211	19.7		
Eeva	436	41	6	27	24	18	8	2	15	191	16.9		
Hymy	669	62	2	18	22	17	9	428	378	35.3			
P.S.	282	26	6	37	23	9	5	1	19	118	11.0		
Pirkka	712	66	0	7	8	5	4	2	74	601	56.1		
Suomalainen	730	68	0	9	6	5	2	2	75	617	67.6		
Valitut Palat	493	46	4	14	15	13	6	2	46	321	30.0		
(2) German filter question (<i>n</i> = 879)													
Avotakka	366	42	5	22	30	16	5	2	20	172	19.6	−0.1	
Eeva	373	42	5	27	27	16	9	2	15	163	18.5	+1.6	
Hymy	560	64	3	18	22	14	9	5	28	317	36.1	+0.8	
P.S.	216	25	2	32	25	16	5	2	17	95	10.8	−0.2	
Pirkka	598	68	3	7	8	7	4	4	69	486	55.3	−0.8	
Suomalainen	622	71	2	8	6	4	2	3	76	529	60.2	+2.6	
Valitut Palat	450	51	4	14	14	12	7	4	45	297	33.8	+3.8	
Total												+7.7	
Average												+1.1	

TABLE 3
Experiment with filter questions – fortnightlies

	Read within filter period		0/6	1/6	2/6	Frequency				6/6	Readers	Coverage	Difference
	<i>n</i>	%	%	%	%	3/6	4/6	5/6	%	<i>n</i>	%		
(1) Finnish filter question (<i>n</i> = 1071)													
Kodin Kuvalehti	407	38	3	18	20	17	8	3	31	232	21.7		
Koneviesti	182	17	1	16	17	13	8	6	38	116	10.8		
Kotiliesi	439	41	4	13	17	17	7	3	40	277	25.9		
Me-Lehti	367	34	2	10	13	7	3	4	62	281	26.2		
Pellervo	225	21	3	13	10	8	6	3	56	162	15.1		
Tekniikan	449	42	1	18	18	11	7	5	39	279	26.1		
Maailma													
Uusi Maailma	451	42	3	18	24	16	9	3	27	245	22.9		
(2) German filter question (<i>n</i> = 879)													
Kodin Kuvalehti	352	40	4	18	24	15	8	4	26	189	21.5	−0.2	
Koneviesti	151	17	6	24	17	11	5	5	33	84	9.6	−1.2	
Kotiliesi	357	41	5	14	20	12	9	5	35	216	24.6	−1.3	
Me-Lehti	310	35	4	14	15	9	5	2	51	209	33.6	−2.4	
Pellervo	205	23	4	13	13	8	2	3	56	145	16.5	+1.4	
Tekniikan	386	44	4	18	18	11	9	4	35	229	26.1	—	
Maailma													
Uusi Maailma	374	43	4	21	22	16	8	5	24	196	22.3	−0.6	
Total												−4.3	
Average												−0.6	

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TABLE 4
Experiment with filter questions – weeklies

	Read within filter period		Frequency							Readers <i>n</i>	Coverage %	Difference
	<i>n</i>	%	0/6 %	1/6 %	2/6 %	3/6 %	4/6 %	5/6 %	6/6 %			
(1) Finnish filter question (<i>n</i> = 1071)												
Anna	486	45	3	17	21	12	8	4	35	288	26.9	
Apu	759	71	2	7	13	14	9	6	50	556	51.9	
Jaana	444	41	2	23	21	16	6	3	30	244	22.8	
Katso	233	22	6	19	15	13	6	3	37	148	13.8	
Me Naiset	479	45	2	16	20	11	9	3	37	292	27.3	
Seura	740	69	1	10	12	13	10	6	48	530	49.5	
Yhteishyvä	492	46	1	8	5	4	4	2	76	417	38.9	
(2) German filter question (<i>n</i> = 879)												
Anna	400	46	4	16	20	14	11	6	29	232	26.4	−0.5
Apu	615	70	2	7	13	14	9	5	50	445	50.6	−1.3
Jaana	351	40	4	19	21	17	12	5	23	187	21.3	−1.5
Katso	224	25	5	21	17	13	7	4	33	128	14.6	+0.8
Me Naiset	393	45	3	18	20	15	9	5	29	222	25.3	−2.0
Seura	563	64	2	10	11	16	11	6	44	393	44.7	−4.8
Yhteishyvä	412	47	2	7	5	4	5	2	76	354	40.3	+1.4
Total												−7.9
Average												−1.1

reader estimates and for fortnightly and weeklies slightly lower estimates. These differences could not be considered statistically significant. The main finding was, however, that there were no noteworthy differences between the systems in the infrequent ends (0/6–1/6) of

the reading frequency scale and that the differences were among the number of frequent readers.

This experiment with filter questions did not prove our hypothesis right, and no changes were made in the NRS.