

WEEKLY MEASUREMENT OF ISSUE BY ISSUE READERSHIP USING THE RECENT READING METHOD

Report on an experiment that partly failed, due to new technology
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1. Introduction

In the discussion between Through The Book and Recent Reading, one of the major issues is "Can we trust Readers' Memories" (Michael Brown, title chapter two in Dear Reader, 1990).

As Michael Brown states in that chapter: "At the hart of the Recent Reading method of readership measurement lies asking people the question "when did you last read or look through such-and-such a newspaper or magazine?"

One of the big differences with Through The Book is that a person's memory, in the case of Through The Book, is triggered by showing (real or stripped) issues of the magazine concerned.

Consequently, it is often stated that recent reading is overclaiming average issue readership because of "telescoping" and that the model itself presents an unavoidable limitation on its accuracy because of parallel and/or replicate reading.

The nature of the Recent Reading method does not allow for measuring the readership of individual issues of a magazine. There are at least two reasons why it is of interest to try to combine the Recent Reading method with the measurement of individual issues of magazines:

1. It could probably be possible to extricate some of the effects of replicate reading and parallel reading.
2. Ideally, it would be possible to produce reading figures of individual issues of a magazine and follow the readership life cycle of an individual issue.

Of course, one of the technical problems is how to confront people with (the details of) a particular issue while speaking to them by telephone, or how to distribute the latest issues to interviewers for face-to-face interviews.

In the case of Computer Assisted Personal Interviewing (CAPI) as used in the UK (Erhard Meier and Steven Finch: Capi and the NRS - San Fransisco 1993), downloading of specific items of an issue is technical feasible, but in the case of telephone interviewing it just is not possible to show people any material.

A new technique (or a combination of two old techniques) provided an opportunity to carry out an experiment in the Netherlands with a Recent Reading type (issue by issue) telephone measurement.

The experiment "issue by issue measurement of readership" was supported by Initiative Media in the Netherlands.

The experiment was part of a larger experimental programme called "Phone Text" (see van Meerem in ESOMAR Athens 1994 and also chapter 3).

The experiment was carried out during the last 9 weeks of 1994, and then was stopped because of disappointing responses week by week.

The results of these 9 weeks were then put into the lowest drawer of the author's desk. However, recently, in connection with the World Wide Readership Symposium in Berlin, the dust was blown off it and the results were reanalysed.

Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to show what could have been done with the results if a satisfactorily responding sample would have been achieved. The absolute reading figures have no meaning as such and cannot be compared with other reading figures produced by other measurements like f.i. SUMMO. No attempts were made to reweight the sample to represent the national population. There is for instance a substantial skew towards women in the net sample (40%-60%).

2. Set Up

During 9 weeks a panel of 1000 individuals was instructed to weekly answer a voice response telephone questionnaire assisted by Teletext (see 3).

The questionnaire consisted of:

1. filter question "ever read" of 9 weeklies and 6 monthlies;
2. recent reading of the "ever read" magazines (last 7 days);
3. identifying the issues of the specific magazines of the recently read magazines (last 7 days);
4. identifying two articles out of every issue of the identified issues read over the past 7 days;
5. giving an appreciation (1 - 10) of the articles read over the past 7 days;
6. source of copy read over the past 7 days.

The recent reading question was always defined over the past 7 days both for weeklies and monthlies.

The filter question "ever read" was not asked any more after the first 6 weeks as, after these 6 weeks, the "last 7 days" question would provide the additional information on the ever read question.

Identifying of the issues was triggered by showing people in two sentences, some typical contents of the specific issue., for instance Margriet no. 36: recipes for December/visiting beautiful Ireland.

A panel set up was chosen because the phone text project, of which this experiment was a part, was set up as a panel experiment. A panel has the undisputed advantage that non-response is under control, in this sense that the characteristics of each panel member are known. A second advantage was that longitudinal effects like replicate reading in a second week could be traced in a panel, and not in an ad hoc survey situation.

3. The Technique Phone Text

Phone Text is a multimedia invention which by means of television and especially its videotext function, combined with the telephone and linked with voice response computers, allows one to play 'Questions and Answers' with one's own television set, using one's telephone.

Videotext¹ itself is a medium, developed (by accident) on the back of television. The principle is well known; it is a carousel of pages that can be selected to appear on the television screen by means of the remote control in any home. The videotext inserter can change the contents of any page that is transmitted. Continuously all pages are sequentially transmitted, and all pages are public.

The telephone system has developed itself into a real medium in this sense that it no longer is a communication medium between two individuals; on the contrary, it can now be used as a medium bringing commercial messages to thousands of people.

A major break through in the development of telephone communication as a medium was brought by the arrival of the voice response computer which is able to replace professional telephone operators. The consumer who calls, or who is called by a voice response computer, can communicate in a question and answer situation with the pre-programmed voice response computer by pushing keys on his telephone keypad or even by voice (in the latter case this is called voice response and voice recognition).

A modern voice response computer can handle hundreds of callers at the same time.

In the **Phone Text** concept, the voice response computer is linked to the videotext inserter, which means that, if the consumer presses the right key on his telephone key pad, he changes at the same time the contents of the videotext page he is looking at. Through this multimedia technique, one can use interactive television for games, for direct response advertising, and for research purposes (see also appendix).

Three companies in the Netherlands initiated an experiment using **Phone Text**, especially in regard to using it as a research tool, i.e.: Teleworld, the telephone services company; IPN, the airtime sales house for RTL; and Intomart, the market research company.

¹ In the Netherlands and Belgium: Teletext; in the U.K.: Ceefax; in Germany: Videotext; in Italy: Televideo. Most European channels use their name with the suffix "text", like RTL text, MTV text, CNN text, etc.

Teleworld

Teleworld is an international multimedia concern, with subsidiaries in a great many European countries. Teleworld develops and produces interactive services, utilizing the consumer infrastructure of telephone, television and teletext combined.

Their products include a variety of games and competitions, information services, direct marketing and direct response services.

Teleworld has signed exclusive partnership agreements with a large number of European television organizations, including RTL Television in Germany, RTL4/5 in the Netherlands and MTV Europe. Because of these contracts, Teleworld services can be seen in tens of millions of households throughout Europe.

IPN

IP Netherlands is the sales house for RTL4/5, Veronica, FilmNet, RTL Radio and some magazines. IP Netherlands forms part of the IP Group, currently Europe's largest multimedia marketing organization. Apart from operating commercial television and radio stations, IP is continuously looking for ways to innovate the use of these media. Furthermore, IP is actively involved in research into measuring and, where possible, in optimizing the effectiveness of television advertising. IPN makes teletext available in the Phone Text concept.

Intomart

Intomart is the complete service market research bureau providing all audience research data for the television and radio industry in the Netherlands, and besides that, f.i. the audience for outdoor.

The experiment resulted in the research instrument: **The Phone Text Panel**, i.e. a panel of a 1000 households available for ad hoc research and for semi permanent questioning. Due to the background of its two originators (IP and Intomart), it should not be surprising that most of the research carried out by means of this panel concerns media research. IP uses this instrument particularly for the measurement of the advertising effectiveness of television campaigns as a service to their advertisers; Intomart is experimenting with a weekly measurement of magazines and direct mail penetration.

3.1. More About the Research Technique

For each survey, a fixed scenario is constructed, with fixed videotext screens and fixed audio questions providing multiple choice answers. This scenario has to be fashioned into a menu-driven system in which the consumer/respondent can effortlessly find his or her way.

This scenario or script has to be put together afresh for each ad hoc survey. The basic structure of the script is provided by Intomart, Teleworld makes it work.

At first members of the panel were requested by mail (multimedia!) to ring the voice response computer. Currently, a voice response computer calls the 1000 households and indicates the specific member of the household who is requested to call back on a toll free number. The ultimate solution will be that the voice response computer calls the household and the target member giving him/her the opportunity to answer to the questionnaire then and there, or to call back later.

The respondent then has to switch on the television set, tune to RTL4 (or RTL5) and choose RTL text. Subsequently, the voice response computer asks him/her to give his/her pin-code and indicates the personal videotext page number he/she should switch to. Once this page is chosen, the question and answers will be put to the respondent both over the phone and on the screen, triggered by the keys pressed on the telephone keypad.

An important detail concerns the fact that the system can work with any telephone (tone or pulse) and with any telephone distribution system, but its results are only 100% accurate when tone telephones are used in a digital distribution system.

The answers are stored on the Teleworld voice response computer and are transferred to Intomart, where the necessary data processing takes place and statistical reports are produced.

The firm opinion of the three partners in this experiment is that the situation where the computer pinpoints and specifically calls the client/respondent is the most desired one. During the first five surveys, this mechanism could not be used for technical reasons. Consequently, the response rates were lower than expected. However, they are convinced that, with the ideal call-out option, response rates of 70% in a panel can be achieved.

3.2. Representativeness of the Phone Text Panel

A major limitation of **Phone Text** is that it needs two technical devices in the household. The respondent has to have a telephone and a television set with a videotext decoder. In the Netherlands this requirement hardly causes any problems. The telephone penetration is 98%. The "teletext" penetration is 65%. And even more importantly, hardly any discriminatory power is evident any more in the ownership of "teletext". It simply is a question of replacement of old sets. Of all new sets, 99% is sold with a videotext decoder; these sets are available in all price ranges.

Of course the originators realise that, in some other European countries, both requirements can, at this moment, constitute a threshold to using **Phone Text**. To be fair, a third limitation must be mentioned. Preferably, the telephone system should largely be a digital system, and the telephones in the homes preferably based on tone and not on pulse. **Phone Text** does work with old fashioned pulse phones and with ordinary (i.e. non-digital) telephone systems, but under those circumstances it is not as fast and not as accurate. See also chapter 5.6.

4. Expected Results; Hypotheses

The following results were expected from the readership measurement experiment:

1. The "ever read" filter question should, after a few weeks, produce a constant figure, as asking the same question over a period of 6 weeks should bring forth similar answers. After that initial period, the "last 7 days" question should show a slow increase in the "ever read" results.
2. The "last 7 days" question on titles should, on the one hand, show a constant figure on "every issue" readership and, on the other hand, a variation in the weekly figure, reflecting the way people read magazines.
3. Replicate reading should become evident if the issue is read for the second or third time one or more weeks later.
4. Parallel reading (more issues in one week) should become evident.
5. The reading life cycle of an issue should become evident, maximally over a period of 6 weeks.

The issue by issue readership should show a constant figure, i.e. one similar to the one produced by the typical subscription-based titles in regard to the most recent issue; it should also show the effect the typical situation in the Netherlands that portfolio subscription has on the readership of older issues.

6. Last but not least; the experiment should show whether it is possible to measure issue by issue readership in a telephone voice response system with the assistance of (Tele)text prompting, and whether a satisfactory response rate can be achieved employing a panel of 1000 individuals.

5. Results

The results are reported according to the expected results as mentioned in chapter 4. All results are presented in percentages of the unweighted net sample.

Because the net numbers are disappointingly low (on average 210 individuals per week) the absolute results are of no interest whatsoever. What is interesting, however, is whether the experiment provides some insight into the hypotheses mentioned above.

The results are shown for the 7 most important weeklies: womens weeklies Margriet and Libelle, family magazines Panorama and Nieuwe Revu, and the three gossips Story, Privé and Weekend.

5.1. Stability Of "Ever Read" Question During the First 6 Weeks in Percentages

	Wk1	Wk2	Wk3	Wk4	Wk5	Wk6	Average
Margriet	49	49	51	42	43	47	47
Libelle	46	49	51	46	48	48	48
Panorama	24	27	35	26	33	38	30
Nieuwe Revu	18	19	21	20	28	27	22
Story	36	35	36	33	36	37	35
Privé	33	36	34	37	36	38	36
Weekend	22	22	26	26	26	28	25

Weekly answers to the question "did you ever read this title" look stable over the 6 weeks. The variation is also caused by the fact that each of the samples were different. The last three weeks the filter question "did you ever read" was not asked. In those three weeks, a cumulative growth of reading is evident caused by the question on the last 7 days in those target groups answering the "ever read" question with "no" in (any one of) the previous 6 weeks. This growth figure is an indication of what people have in mind while answering the "ever read" question.

The following table shows the percentage of readers over three week period in the "not ever read" section of each title. Growth figure of "read in at least 3 weeks" in the answering no to the "ever read" question.

Margriet	25%
Libelle	22%
Panorama	13%
Nieuwe Revu	14%
Story	31%
Privé	22%
Weekend	17%

The above table shows that, without the filter question being asked, most weekly titles build up a total reach of up to one third (Story) of the ones that answered no to the "ever read" question. A puzzling result that asks for more analyses. One of the explanations is that people are not consistent in answering the ever read question the second and third time.

5.2. Stability Of A.I.R.

Stability of "Read in the last 7 days" per title per week as percentages of the net sample

	Wk1	Wk2	Wk3	Wk4	Wk5	Wk6	Wk7	Wk8	Wk9	Average
Margriet	33	29	26	22	24	26	29	25	25	27
Libelle	32	30	30	27	30	30	29	30	30	30
Panorama	14	13	15	13	18	19	14	17	19	15
Nieuwe Revu	10	10	12	8	15	11	12	14	14	12
Story	26	20	26	18	19	20	27	23	24	22
Privé	17	16	19	18	19	21	19	20	24	19
Weekend	12	14	17	13	14	15	13	16	18	15

As can be seen, the stability of the A.I.R. is more striking than the variation.

If the "source of copy" results in the next table are examined, a lot is explained by the fact that, for these titles, a high percentage of portfolio subscriptions is present in the sample; this means that most of these titles are read in the same household from week to week.

Source of Copy Per Title

	Newstand	Subscription	Portfolio	Others	Total
Margriet	13	11	38	38	100%
Libelle	10	28	27	35	100%
Panorama	10	6	55	29	100%
Nieuwe Revu	9	3	67	21	100%
Story	14	2	44	40	100%
Privé	12	4	46	38	100%
Weekend	15	2	51	32	100%

5.3. Replicate Reading

For some of the main titles the percentages are shown of the total readership that can be accounted for as replicate reading.

The calculated figure is the percentage of the total number of times an issue was claimed as read in a specific week, that the same person claimed to have read it during a second or third week.

The figures shown are a indication of the effect on the a.i. readership because: on the one hand, not everyone responded all 9 weeks running, so this figure is an underclaim; on the other hand, whether a respondent claimed replicate readership together with a first read readership was not taken into account either, so the figure in that respect is an overclaim (see also 5.4 parallel reading).

The results are presented as an average over 6 weeks. These are the middle six issue weeks. They have had the maximum amount of time to be replicated in later weeks.

Replicate readership

Margriet	20%
Libelle	20%
Panorama	13%
Nieuwe Revu	13%
Story	13%
Privé	18%
Weekend	12%

5.4. Parallel Reading

Parallel reading is supposed to be the antithesis of replicate reading; it is supposed to have a compensating effect on replicate reading. If a title is being claimed as having being read over the past seven days, one reader is counted, although he/she could have read two or more issues over the same period.

The figures shown are the numbers of readers that claimed a second (of more) issue(s) in the same week as percentages of the total number of issues claimed in that week. For the same reason as mentioned in 5.3 in respect to replicate reading, the figures are calculated over the middle six week numbers out of nine of the title, so the effect of a title not being mentioned in the questionnaires during these six weeks is minimal.

The figures show the number of individuals per week that claimed a second issue of the title as a percentage of the total number of people that claimed any issue of that title in that week.

Margriet	17%
Libelle	15%
Panorama	19%
Nieuwe Revu	14%
Story	13%
Privé	21%
Weekend	21%

If these results are compared with those of replicate reading, the compensating effect is quite evident.

5.5. The Reading Life Cycle of a Magazine in 6 Weeks Time

The results show that, in the Netherlands, the average weekly has a much longer life cycle than 6 weeks.

The two leading womens weeklies show the following 6 weeks profile:

	Wk1	Wk2	Wk3	Wk4	Wk5	Wk6	Total
Margriet	23%	21%	15%	15%	11%	15%	100%
Libelle	30%	23%	12%	13%	10%	12%	100%

The two family magazines provide a similar profile:

	Wk1	Wk2	Wk3	Wk4	Wk5	Wk6	Total
Panorama	21%	21%	14%	16%	14%	12%	100%
Nieuwe Revu	20%	19%	14%	16%	16%	15%	100%

The three gossip magazines are also subject to this trend:

	Wk1	Wk2	Wk3	Wk4	Wk5	Wk6	Total
Story	21%	20%	16%	15%	12%	16%	100%
Privé	24%	19%	15%	14%	12%	16%	100%
Weekend	21%	22%	13%	16%	12%	16%	100%

All these weeklies have a strong position in the "weekly portfolios" which are very popular in the Netherlands.

A different profile is shown by the monthly "Allerhande" which is available free of charge at the no. 1 super market chain AH.

	Wk1	Wk2	Wk3	Wk4	Wk5	Wk6	Total
Allerhande	63%	14%	8%	5%	6%	4%	100%

That the "weekly portfolio" has a marked influence on the life cycle of a magazine is also shown by two other monthlies, i.e. Rails, which is available free of charge in trains, and Readers Digest (Het Beste). Both are also not available in portfolios.

	Wk1	Wk2	Wk3	Wk4	Wk5	Wk6	Total
Rails	56%	16%	5%	7%	9%	7%	100%
Het Beste	47%	30%	6%	5%	6%	6%	100%

These results confirm what was already known, i.e. that a relatively large proportion of readership in the Netherlands consists of older issues due to the "weekly portfolio" extending the life cycle of a magazine's issue by much more than the 6 weeks we covered in our study. Most portfolios offer a range of magazines up to 13 weeks old.

5.6. Response

The response rate achieved by the experiment was disappointing.

Of the total sample of 1000 individuals of 13 years and over (one per household), 460 individuals responded at least one week. Those 460 individuals responded on average 4.1 weeks out of 9 weeks. Therefore the average weekly response amounted to 210 individuals.

In that sense, the experiment failed technically. Two reasons can be indicated for this poor result.

1. The ultimate intention was to automatically call the panel; they could then respond immediately to the questionnaire. Due to a delay in the technical development, this facility was not available during the course of the experiment. People were requested to call a toll free number, but then this toll free number was often engaged when they called.
2. Telephone sets of an older generation use the so called pulse technique. The success rate of these phones in communicating with the voice response computer is 80%, each time they try to answer. It can be easily calculated how great chances are that, in a questionnaire of app. 20 questions, the respondent is turned down by the system. So people don't try anymore. The issue by issue experiment was the fifth in a row.

The combination of these two failings of the system were the underlying conditions which caused the experiment as such to be called a failure.

6. Conclusions And Summary

A very interesting experiment was carried out. The purpose of the study was to establish whether it is possible to measure issue by issue readership by means of a panel while employing the "recent reading" method, using voice response telephone computers to go automatically through the question and answer routine, assisted by pictorial and textual information on the issues concerned on teletext. This instrument, "Phone Text", is an experimental development by Teleworld, IP and Intomart in the Netherlands.

Due to technical problems, the weekly response rate was so low (21% average), that the experiment may be considered to be a failure.

On the other hand, most results show that the instrument Phone Text, when its theething troubles are overcome, can be applied very effectively to measure issue by issue readership, and should consequently be capable of providing data on replicate reading and parallel reading.

The first results indicate that, looking at the rough figures and taking the low response rate into account, replicate reading is almost completely compensated by parallel reading.

The stable results are probably due to the fact that in these small samples only some major weekly titles could be analysed. Especially these titles (two womens magazines, two family magazines and three gossip magazines), all being weeklies, do on the one hand have a stable circulation build up by subscription per title, but due to the typically Dutch portfolio subscribership, most of these titles are combined in one portfolio; consequently, in these households the possibility that all of them are read over the past 7 days is high.

To show the full power of the instrument, especially in regard to magazines with a small circulation that have to rely to a greater extent on news stand sales, a much larger panel is needed, i.e. one of app. 2000 or 3000 individuals; of course, the response rate also needs to be significantly higher. The latter is presently being tested with new and improved hard- and software.

APPENDIX



