

RESPONSE RATES AND RESPONDENT'S PROFILE IN FRENCH READERSHIP SURVEYS

Françoise Dupont , CESP

Press readership measurement in France, carried out by the CESP since 1957, underwent a profound reorganisation in 1993.

Today, there are two separate surveys, each based on a different methodology.

- One is a telephone survey conducted by IPSOS for daily newspapers and supplements;
- The other is a face-to-face survey conducted by three research companies (ISL, IPSOS and SOFRES) on behalf of the AEPM (association of magazine press publishers).

The CESP has been supervising both surveys since 1993 and, twice a year, publishes a technical report on the methodology and results obtained.

Compared to the CESP survey, which included both daily newspapers and magazines, this new arrangement made it possible to develop the methodology best suited to each press type. On the other hand, having two different databases collected from two independent samples did pose certain problems: they could not be used for media planning unless the files were merged.

What we intend to discuss in this paper are the measures IPSOS took to improve the response rate in the daily press readership survey, first generally, then more specifically the elusive categories.

1. Main Methodological Characteristics Of The Survey

1.1 The Sample

The daily press readership survey is conducted among a normal sample of 21,200 persons of 15 and over, using the CATI system.

The interviews are done every evening of the week from 6 pm onwards. This makes it possible to interview working persons and, especially, the "ABC ones", great readers of national dailies.

The sampling design was also devised to satisfy problems specific to the daily press:

- To cover the regional dailies' circulation areas as best as possible and obtain sample representativeness at the "département" level, maximum geographical dispersion of sampling points was used (one per interview);
- Selection of the sample communes complied with the relative weight of each "département" in each INSEE region and with that of the various categories of communities in each "département".

Nevertheless, in order to obtain a minimum of 100 interviews each and to over-represent the Paris region - where national dailies predominate - a variable sampling rate per "département" was applied.

Telephone numbers were taken at random from a database extracted from the telephone directories, and included only private numbers. The numbers were taken in one go for the entire year and broken down into daily batches corresponding to the number of interviews to be carried out each day.

In 1994, for example, the survey ran in two waves of 13 weeks each. The 21,207 telephone numbers, representing the initial draw, were divided into 182 batches of 115 or 116 numbers.

Lastly, the selection of persons to interview in each household contacted was done according to daily quotas (sex × age × working/non-working).

1.2 Managing The Telephone Calls

In 1993, for a given non-answer or engaged line, each number from the initial selection was called up to three times before being shuffled and in 1994, on CESP's recommendation, the number of times a number was dialled rose to five. If, after these attempts, no interview was obtained, the number was shuffled. A new number was generated by retaining the first six digits and shuffling the last two in a random manner.

Using this procedure made it possible to contact individuals whose number was unlisted without altering the sampling design in terms of geographical breakdown.

The telephone contacts were managed by the software programme directly and broken down into the following ten categories:

1. Interview accepted
2. Corporate number, or fax
3. Person not living at number called
4. Wrong number
5. Outside initial zone (for shuffled numbers only)
6. Refusal
7. Interview Stopped
8. Appointment made
9. Line engaged
10. No answer

Only the last three categories were called again:

→ **Appointment made:** this depended on the quotas. Calling back could be postponed until later in the evening or a different day and could be done more than five times;

→ **Line engaged:** a busy number was called again 10 minutes later;

→ **No answer:** the number was called again two hours later.

2. Analysis Of Calls And Response Rates

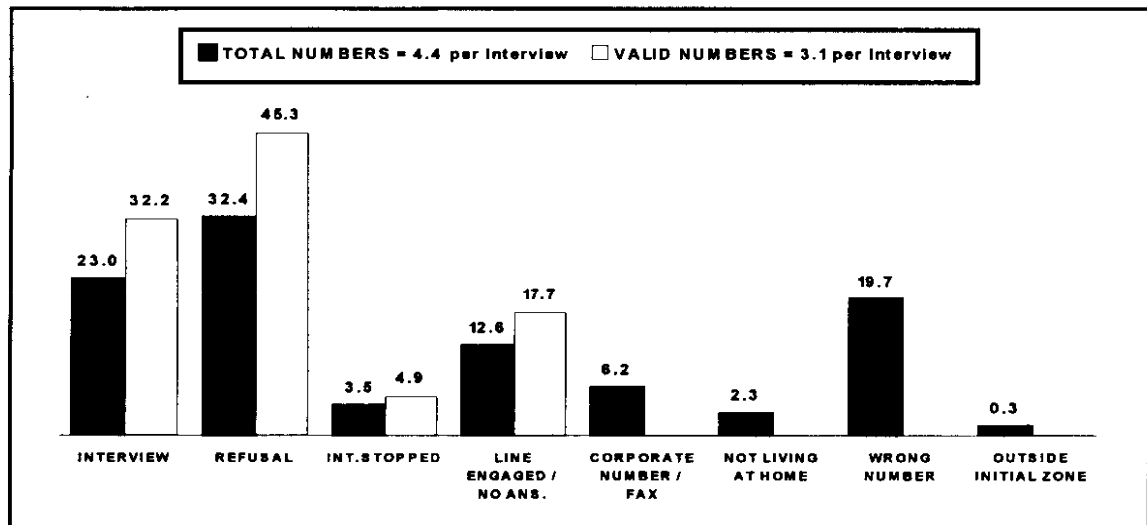
The results come from the IPSOS survey of 1994.

To do the 21,207 interviews spread throughout France, a total of 91,175 telephone numbers were required, *i.e.* an average of 4.4 numbers per interview.

If we exclude the non-valid numbers (corporate, fax, wrong, outside the survey scope or initial zone), the amount of valid numbers decreases to 65,188, which in turn brings the average amount of numbers required per interview to 3.1. (*Fig. 1*)

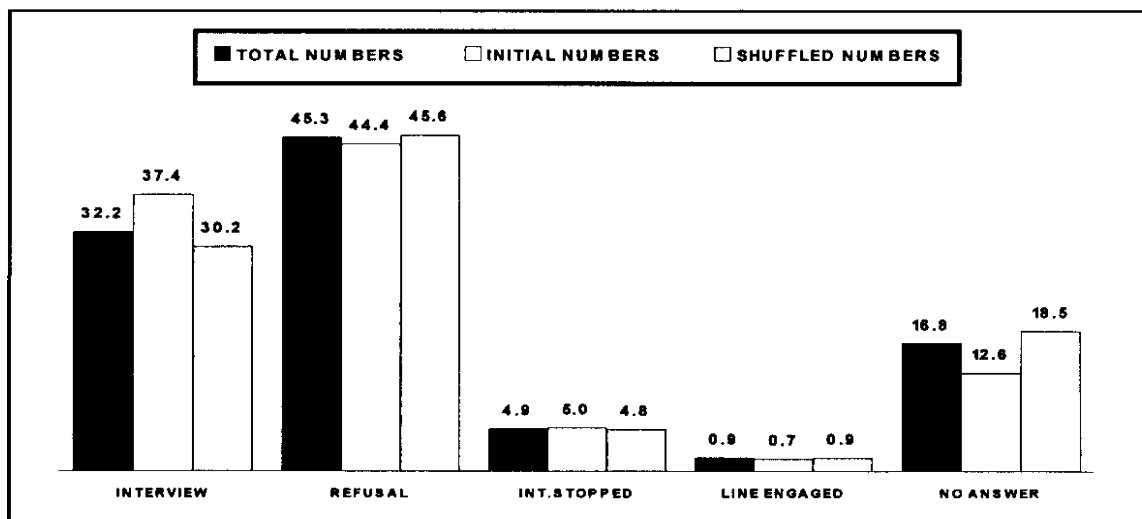
The response rate, calculated on the basis of valid numbers and after five calls, was thus 32.2%. Analysing the calls which did not end in an interview gives the following results: refusals: 45.3%; stopped interview: 4.9%; line engaged or no answer: 17.7%.

FIGURE 1



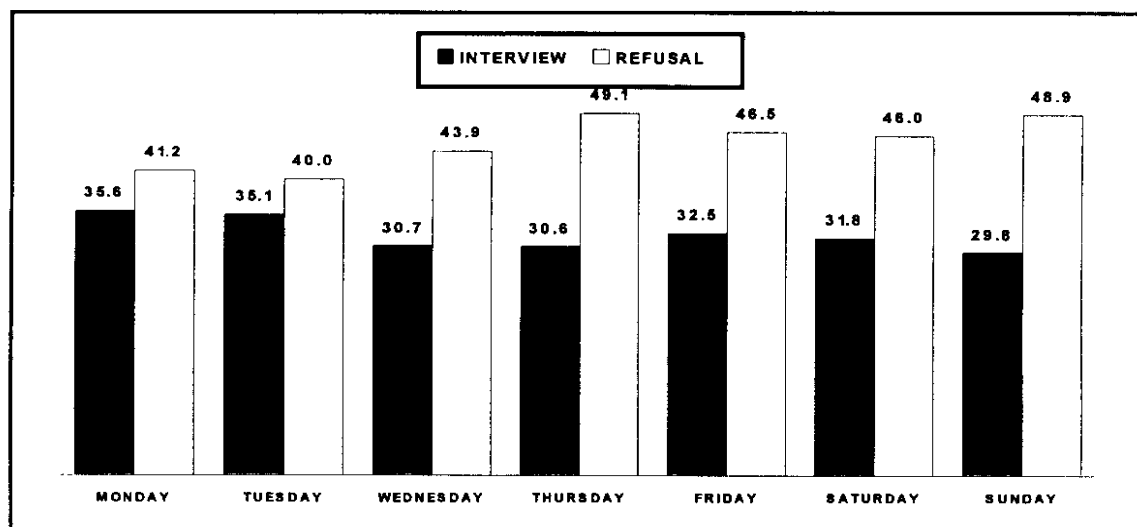
The response rate was slightly higher for numbers taken from the initial selection compared to that of numbers whose last two digits had been shuffled. Among the initial sample, the interview rate was 37.4%, whereas among the shuffled numbers, it was only 30.2%. The difference was due to the late hour at which corporate numbers were called, resulting in a greater proportion of no-answers. (Fig. 2)

FIGURE 2



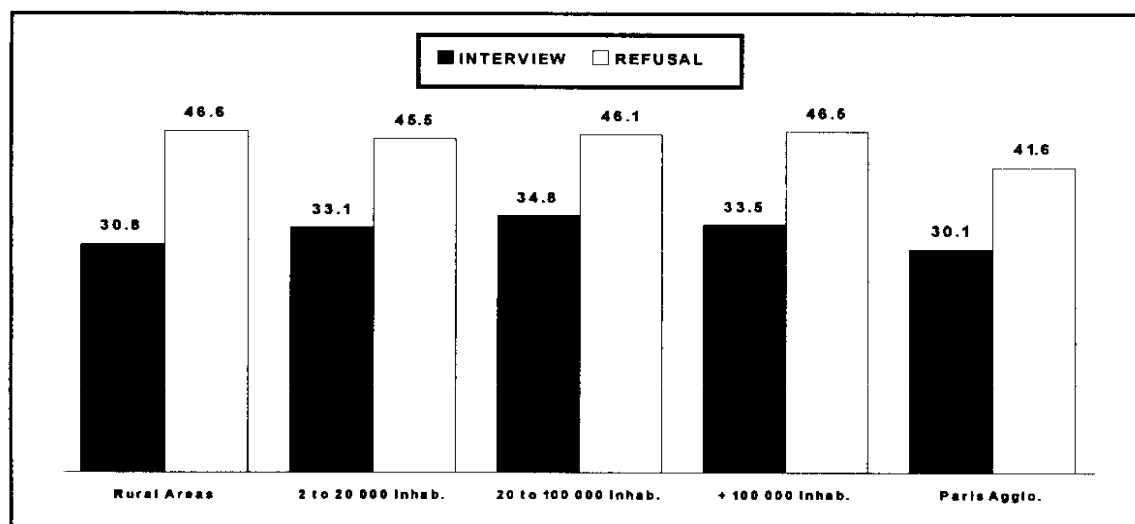
Analysing the response rate on the basis of all valid numbers according to day of the week shows that the highest average response rates occurred on Mondays and Tuesdays. Similarly, the highest refusal rate occurred during the weekend (49% on Sunday as against an average of 44% from Monday to Friday). (Fig. 3)

FIGURE 3



Concerning the category of community, the response rates were lowest in country areas and the Paris region. In rural areas, it was largely due to the high rates of refusal (46.6%). On the other hand, the lowest rate of refusal (41.6%) occurred in the Paris agglomeration. Here, the low figures were due more to the number of persons away from home at the time of call (higher percentage of working persons than outside Paris, travelling time, and different timetables and life styles). (Fig. 4)

FIGURE 4



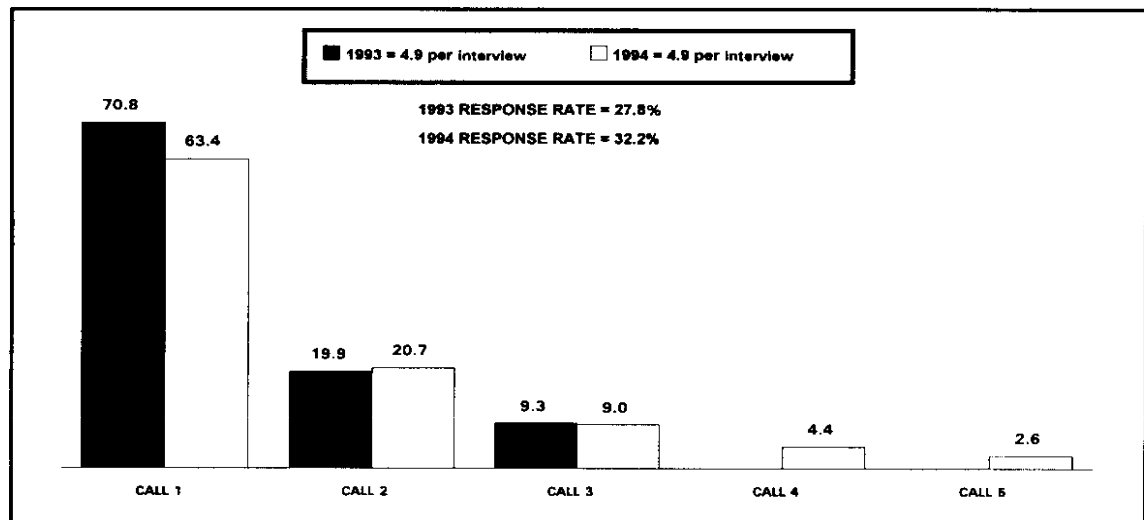
3. Effect Of Number Of Calls On Response Rate And Respondent Profiles

3.1 Comparison Between The 1993 And 1994 Surveys

We shall now look at the effect of moving up from three to five call attempts per number between the 1993 and 1994 surveys.

Increasing the number of call attempts per number made it possible to reduce the average amount of numbers needed to achieve an interview (4.9 in 1993 as against 4.4 in 1994). Adopting this measure also improved the response rate distinctly, rising from 27.8% in 1993 to 32.2% in 1994. Be that as it may, it should also be pointed out that this improvement in response rate was also due to the more precise instructions given to the interviewers and the more stringent management and supervision in the field.).(Fig. 5)

FIGURE 5

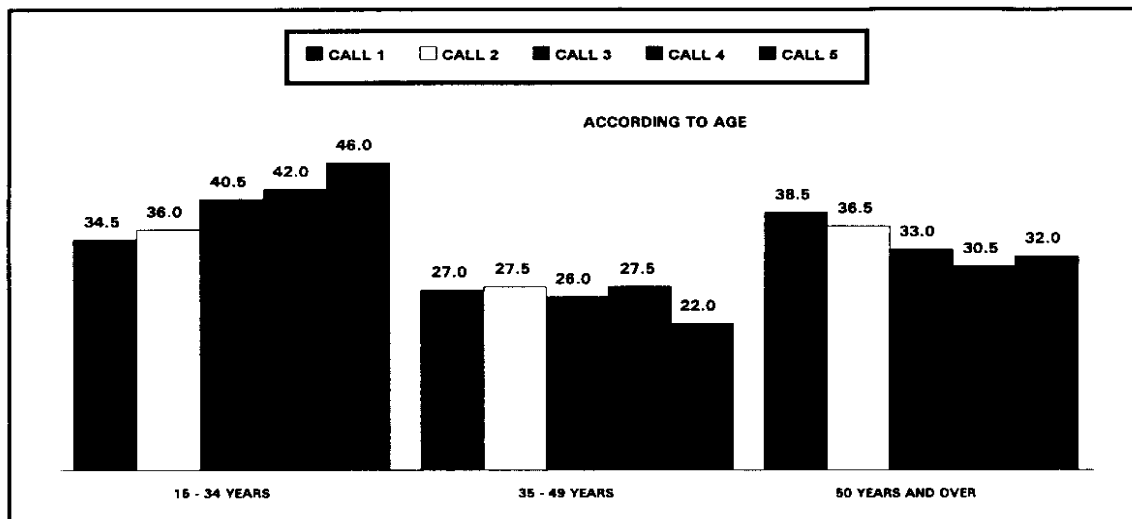


3.2 Respondent Profiles According To Call Rank

Although a relatively small amount of interviews were done after four or five call attempts (7% of the total sample), the respondent profiles according to call rank differed significantly.

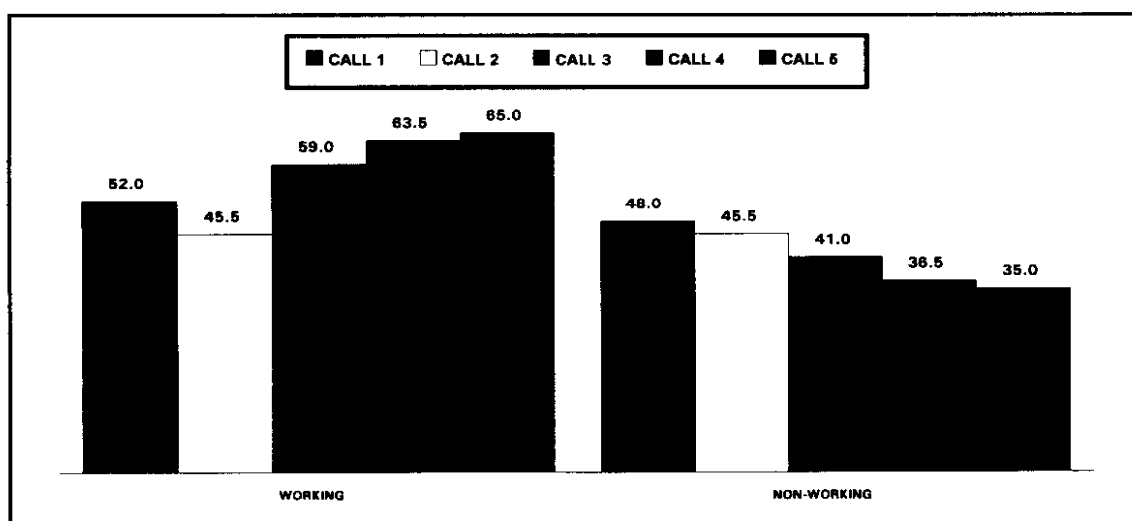
1) The greater the number of attempted calls, the higher the proportion of younger persons (15 to 34): on the first call, the figure was 34.5%; by the fourth call, it had risen to 42%; and by the fifth, to 46%. (*Fig. 6*)

FIGURE 6



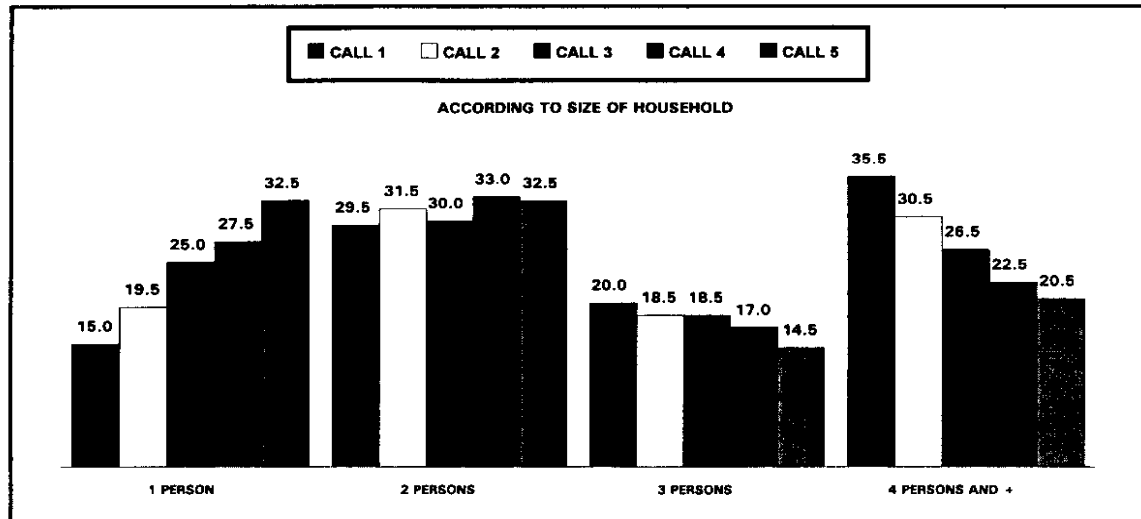
2) Similarly, the proportion of working persons increased with call rank. Almost two thirds of the respondents answering after four or five calls were working, as against less than one half for those answering on the first or second call.; by the fourth call, it had risen to 63.5%; and by the fifth, to 65.0%. (*Fig. 7*)

FIGURE 7



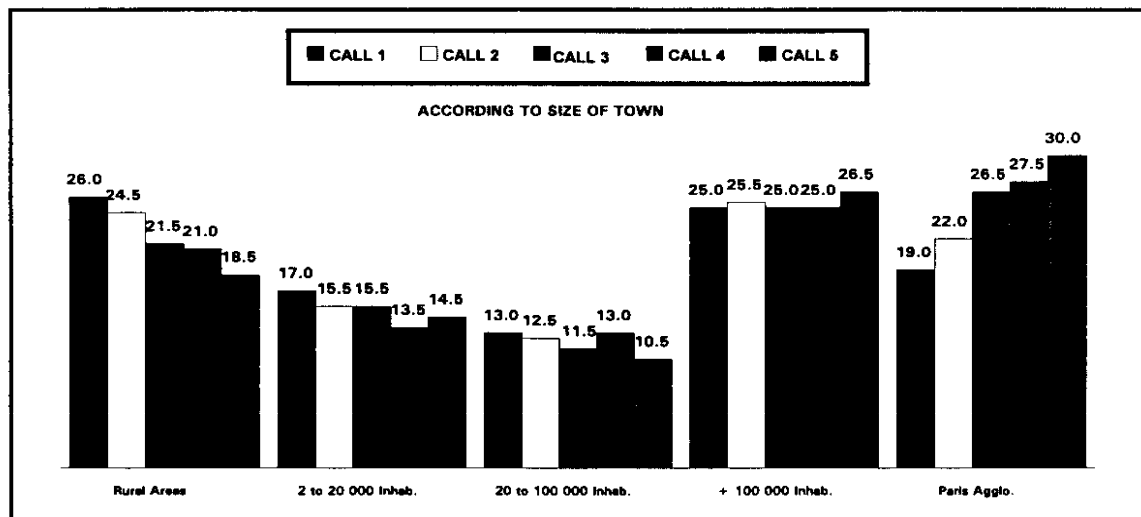
3) Increasing the number of calls also allowed a greater proportion of people living alone to be contacted. The proportion of single-person households rose from 15% at rank 1 to 32.5% at rank 5. Inversely, the proportion of four-and-above-person households decreased with repeated attempts. (Fig. 8)

FIGURE 8



4) Lastly, changing from three to five call attempts resulted in an increased proportion of interviews in the Paris agglomeration where it is particularly difficult to reach people at home. (Fig. 9)

FIGURE 9



The call management system set up by IPSOS and CESP has distinctly improved since the survey was launched in 1993, and has resulted in an increased response rate, especially among persons particularly hard to reach at home.

The improvement is even more noticeable if we compare the results of this telephone survey with those of an experimental survey performed in 1992 under the CESP's press readership survey done face-to-face, according to the quota method.

4. Comparison Of First-Contact Response Rate Between The Phone And Face-To-Face Surveys

In France, most audience surveys are done using the quota method. Although it does have certain advantages - essentially in reducing costs - it does not allow the response rate to be estimated. All that is required is to find individuals that satisfy the quotas used (mainly sex, age and profession of head of family) for them to be interviewed. Hence, in 1992, we decided to conduct an experimental survey among a sub-set of sampling points from the press readership survey.

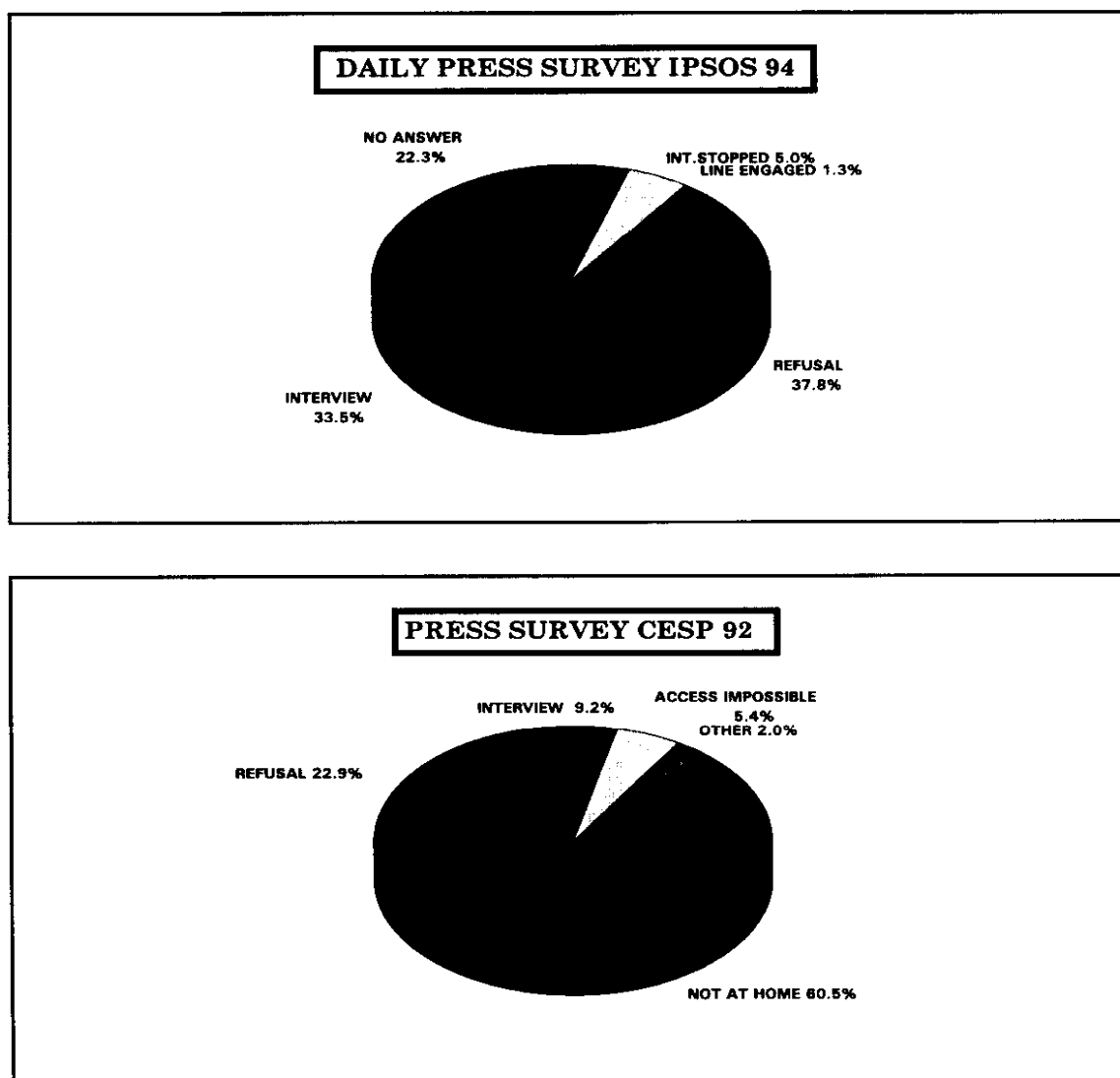
Among the 78 sampling points taken at random from one of the survey waves, the interviewers had to log the number of contacts and corresponding results for each of the eight interviews they were to conduct. Each contact was one-off and no further calls were made.

To try and compare the response rates between a telephone and a face-to-face survey, we calculated the percentage of interviews obtained on the basis of first contacts alone (rank 1 calls) for the telephone survey, and only using the valid contacts, *i.e.* excluding corporate and fax numbers for the telephone survey, and ex-quotas for the face-to-face.

The response rate is distinctly higher in the telephone survey : 33.5% versus only 9.2% in the face-to-face survey.

In the telephone survey, the main reason for non-response was refusals (37.8%), whereas in the face-to-face survey, they only represented 22.9%.

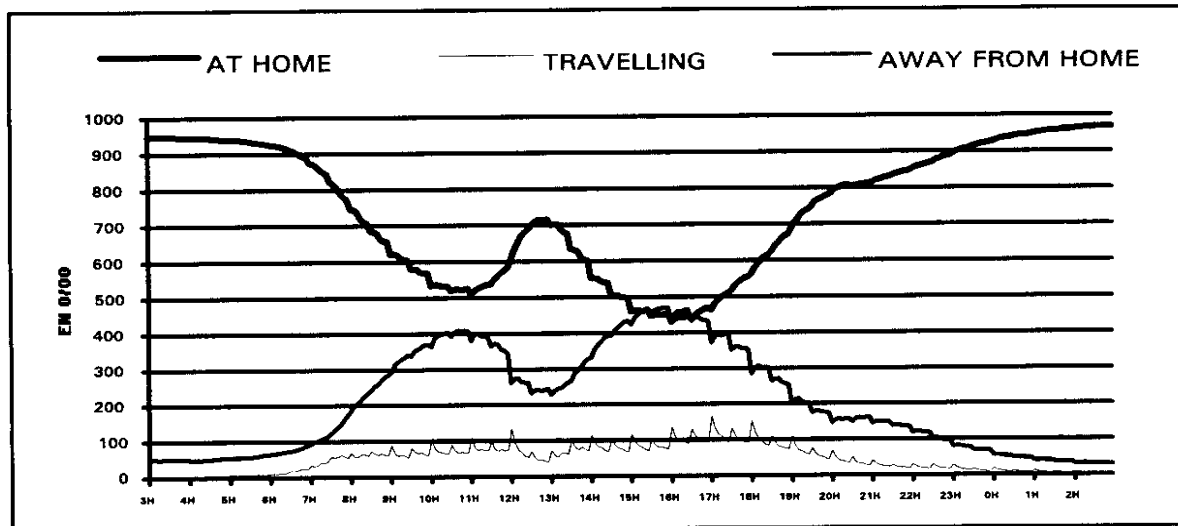
FIGURE 10



On the other hand, the low response rate in the face-to-face survey is largely due to the far higher proportion of persons away from home when the interviewer called (between 9 am and 6 pm for 90% of the sample). (Fig. 10)

In 60% of cases, this was the reason the interview could not be done. If we look at the graph of daytime presence at home taken from the CESP's Multi-Media Time-Budget Survey, the result should not come as a great surprise. (Fig. 11)

FIGURE 11



This year, aware of the problem and in line with the CESP's recommendations, the AEPM has introduced a time constraint into the magazine press readership survey for interviewing the "ABC one" over-sample. The constraint consists of only interviewing individuals living in large towns, after 5 pm.

Doing this made it possible to improve sample representativeness in terms of social grades and interview more working persons, generally hard to reach at home in face-to-face surveys.

Conclusion

To conclude, by being able to call a given number at different times and, if required, at repeated intervals, using the phone clearly allows individuals who often slip through the face-to-face survey net to be interviewed.

This, however, raises the problem of how comparable the two surveys are in terms of sample effects on readership results.

To deal with these two aspects, IPSOS has suggested including a question on the time spent away from home in both press-readership surveys and analysing the results as a function of this criterion, which could be used as a re-weighting variable.

Be this as it may, given the large number of titles involved, measuring magazine readership in France is still best done using the face-to-face method.

The main methodological change should thus be to improve the response rate in face-to-face surveys and might require the quota method to be dropped.

