

# 1.3 Current media research techniques in West Germany: the MA method

## INTRODUCTION

The aim of this paper is to give as precise a summary as possible of those conditions developed in West Germany that are the base of the results of our main model of media planning, called Media-Analysis.

There are a number of very expensive media-planning surveys apart from the MA compiled by publishing companies, but this kind of survey is at present comparable to a satellite that circles around the earth – or in this case the national MA. Without going into that, let us go back to the national MA that was set up in 1954 as 'Leser-Analyse society' by publishing companies and advertising agencies for the purpose of supplying readership data on all German magazines. The design of this first study was based on current research techniques in the USA and Great Britain.

Since that time major changes have been made, which I shall describe now in sequential order. Firstly, in 1966, the form of the question to define the 'reader of an average issue' was changed to the IPA question: 'when last read'. Secondly, in 1967, measuring regularity of reading on a numerical scale was introduced – a first step towards the probability of reading. Finally, in 1972 the society opened up to advertisers and other media. Therefore its name was changed from Leser-Analyse (Readers Analysis) to Media Analysis.

## THE PROBLEM

The first, rather general, question that I must answer is: "What is the MA?"

The MA covers the media behaviour of the West German population: one can almost say all mass media that are relevant to German media planning.

The objective of this yearly survey is the determination of respondent probability of media-usage for the following media: magazines (approximately 95); newspapers (according to region, between 5 and 15); television (10 stations/programmes); radio stations (approximately 14 stations); reading circles; and cinemas.

Apart from some additional general information on standard of living, home decorating, hobbies, etc, this means data that could indicate the respondent's specific media behaviour, and all important socio-demographic data on all members of the household is collected.

To provide more detailed information on how the sample and the questionnaire are designed, the second

question is: "how is the representativeness of the sample ensured?"

## The universe

As the MA is intended to capture the media behaviour of the adult population of West Germany and West Berlin, the universe must be the German-speaking population of this region.

## Households

For the selection of households that are to be interviewed, the total number of households of each sample point has to be determined.

This is done by an inspection on foot, executed for the whole sample point at once or for specific parts of it at different times.

The collected addresses are filed at the institute. For each survey the required amount of addresses (MA: 4 addresses per sample point) is selected at random.

With this selection of households stage two of the sampling is finished. Each address, and therefore each household within the sample point, now has the same chance of being selected.

## Respondents

Within a household all, some or just one person can be interviewed.

For the MA '81 the selection method was one respondent for households with one up to three members, two respondents for households with four or more members. The respondent is selected by a special procedure that in German market research terms is called 'Schwedenschlüssel'.

## The fieldwork design

The MA is drawn up as a continuous survey, running the whole year.

The ideal design of the fieldwork provides an even allocation of the interviews on the  $48 \times 7 = 336$  survey days.

To achieve significant data even for small media (with about 1% reach) the total sample has to comprise approximately 18,000 respondents.

If each interviewer handles four addresses per sample point, each sub-sample, the smallest unit of the MA sample system, consists of  $210 \times 4 = 840$  household addresses. With 24 subsamples  $840 \times 24 = 20,160$  addresses are available.

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### The sampling stages

Polling district, household, respondent. As there exists no general file covering all German adults from which the selection of respondents would be possible, the sampling has to be executed in stages. The first stage is regional areas.

The smallest selectable areas in West Germany and West Berlin are the polling districts of which there are approximately 59,000 in Germany. The number of voters per polling district may by law not exceed 2,500, so the base for the sample is a geographical frame with about the same number of people or households.

The probability principle of the sampling frame provides a chance for every polling district to be part of the selection proportionate to the number of households it contains.

Since 1979 the total sample of the MA has comprised 24 subsamples with 210 polling districts (= 210 sample points) each.

To achieve a maximum of reliability in reproducing the geographical areas of Germany in the MA sample, the polling districts are stratified before selection.

The stratification factors are: Federal states; administrative districts; rural or urban districts; seven community-size classifications; communities in alphabetical order; and, polling districts according to official numeration.

Each selected polling district (= sample point) is defined by a list of streets and house numbers, or a map showing the exact borders of the sample point provided by the community authority.

### Weighting

Each interview from the questionnaire goes into the data bank with the weight 'one'. There the weight is altered to achieve a maximum correspondence of the population model with the reality, and also because interviews are not distributed evenly by day of week.

This leads to three weighting steps: *1st step* Transformation of the household sample into a personal sample; *2nd step* Correction of the personal sample (Base: census figures); *3rd step* Equalisation of the interview days (an even allocation of interviews by weekdays).

These three steps establish a weighting factor of four figures for each respondent.

The third question is: "how is the questionnaire designed?"

The whole questionnaire of the MA comprises approximately 40 pages. Print and electronic media between them make up about 26 pages. All questions are positioned on the left side of the form: the right side is reserved for the interviewer's manual notes. The questions and instructions for the interviewer are printed in identical types and order for all six institutes

responsible for the fieldwork.

### The aided recall booklet

The aided recall booklet contains 48 ring bound cardboard sheets (96 pages). Here on 43 sheets, the various frequency scales of the media are listed and on five sheets there are questions concerning socio-demographic criteria.

### The masthead cards

These identification aids are used on the one hand to clarify for the respondent the questions in which the interviewer is interested.

On the other hand they are of use in the handling of the interview: items that do not pass certain filters are eliminated, and are no longer considered in further questions.

For print media, multicoloured cardboard masthead cards in double postcard-size are used. The mastheads for TV are also multicoloured, for radio black and white. Both are postcard-sized.

### The filter method

Among market researchers in general and especially among media researchers there are two views about filters. Nobody denies the organisational practicality of this technique, to build switches into the interview. On the other hand filters have the unwelcome attribute that once they are employed they cannot be rendered null. That is why filters in the MA are kept as wide as possible.

Now to the general filter of the MA. There are three possible answers for print media: unknown, known only by name, or handled at least once. For electronic media there are just two questions: never heard or seen, or heard or seen at least once.

Therefore the print-media are passed through the general filter by three answers, the electronic media by two answers.

### The time filter

All media pass through the time filter, that delimits the widest circle of media-usage, with three questions. The given questions for last usage, dependent on the publication frequency of the media, are the following: within the last 12 issues; within the last 24 issues; and, longer ago.

Up to the mid-60s the survey results were directly used for media-planning purposes: the readership within the last publication interval was identical with the 'readers per issue' – then, as today, the base for all media planning. With the discovery of the second dimension in media planning – plans with several insertions per media – the immediate relation between survey and utilisation had to be abandoned.

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Today each respondent is asked how many of the last 12 issues he has read. This information 'how many of the last 12 issues' has to be transformed by simulation into the formation 'which of the last 12 issues'. This readership data differs in a characteristic way from that for the readership in the last issue interval (readers per issue by recency):

The readership per issue by frequency was always higher than the readership per issue by recency.

As the size of the surveyed readership is more reliable than that of the calculated readership, the probability of reading is calculated by segmentation.

Let us finally look at the two electronic media, TV and radio. Since these are surveyed in an almost identical fashion, the survey technique can be shown by the following illustration for TV.

**Q31** 1st step: *Which station has the respondent watched at least once before?*

**Q32** 2nd step: *When watched for the last time? (3 given answers)?*

**Q33** 3rd step: *At what time has the respondent generally watched TV lately?*

**Q34** 4th step: *For time and station (see the corresponding arrows) the number of days when TV was watched is now recorded.*

**Q35a/b** 5th step: *At what times TV was watched yesterday generally; and subsequently which station was watched at what time?*