

UPDATE ON THE CURRENT SITUATION ON CAPI WITH AG.MA

Jürgen Wiegand & Gabriele Ritter, Media-Micro-Census GmbH, Germany

Two years ago in Berlin, Jürgen Wiegand reported on the possibilities and advantages which computer-assisted interviews offer for performing media analyses in Germany and on the associated hardware and software requirements. As a brief reminder, research efforts in Germany are focusing on a project enabling survey participants to work at a computer - a pen-operated Touchscreen or Pentop - on their own. Compared with the laptop interviews now used in numerous surveys, this has the advantage of offering broader scope for optical and methodical variation and of reducing to a minimum the influence which the interviewer can exert on the interviewee. The interviewer initially explains how to operate the Pentop machine and thereafter intervenes only to answer queries or to deal with any problems which may arise.

Over the last 1 ½ years, several consecutive test phases have been carried out under this project:

1. Pentop handling test (May '96)
2. Pentop field test (September '96)
3. Belson interviews (July/August '97)

1. Pentop handling test

In this phase the main aim was to test whether the Pentop approach was suitable for carrying out surveys for the purpose of media analysis. Using around 100 survey participants, some of whom were interviewed in the studio, some outside the studio, we tried to ascertain whether the survey participants, especially older participants or persons with no PC experience, would be prepared to work with the CAPI equipment and to use a Pentop machine. In addition, we examined technical aspects, such as the durability and ease of handling of the hardware and software, and looked at any shortfalls or areas which needed to be improved.

After a successful and very promising series of tests, the next phase - the Pentop field test - involving a larger number of survey participants, was initiated.

2. Pentop field test

Whereas the aim of the handling test was to detect shortfalls in the hardware and software, the field test was intended to provide information on the use of Pentop machines in the field under realistic conditions. We examined how larger numbers of interviewees could be organised in field surveys and how data transfer would work. However, the main purpose of our investigations was to test whether the Pentop machines had any effect on the response rate or the structure of survey participants compared with media analyses conducted in face-to-face interviews. To this end, around 750 Pentop interviews were carried out in Hesse under field-test conditions identical to those normally used in media analyses and using the entire media analysis press questionnaire.

A brief comment on the most important results:

On the technical side (field logistics, data transfer, hardware, software) there were no problems whatsoever. The response rate in the field test was around 75% despite the very short field-test time allocated. A comparison of the structure of the Pentop survey sample and the conventional media analysis sample initially revealed no significant differences. With regard to the demographic variables sex, age, education, profession etc., there were only slight differences against the standard media analysis sample and these were rectified by weighting. However, a further analysis of the data revealed several distinctive features which may be attributable to the following influential factors:

- Despite the rather small demographic differences, the structure of interviewees participating in the Pentop survey seems to be different to that of the media analysis sample. The interviewees in the Pentop survey sample behave in a "younger" way to those in the media analysis sample, for example they are more active in their free time, have more modern domestic appliances and furnishings and seem to be more receptive to technology.
- In analysing the data we noticed that in the general filter, through which all 150 mast-head cards from the media analysis pass, the second of the three answer categories ("known only by name") was selected more than the average number of times. This could possibly point to a mechanistic influence brought about by the nature of the Pentop survey. The survey participants had to drag the mast-head cards onto the appropriate answer fields using the pen, much the same as in solitaire. Given the large selection of mast-heads, this might have had a tiring effect on the survey participants. Perhaps this part of the interview was not implemented in a "Pentop-compatible" way.

- It is also conceivable that the differences in interview situations may have had an effect. In the Pentop interview answers are given anonymously from the outset. In contrast to the paper-pencil approach, the interviewer does not react to the way in which the interviewee has responded, which means that the interviewee can answer more "freely".
- With regard to the media survey, we noticed that in some cases the responses to the use of print differed considerably between the Pentop and paper-pencil interviews, possibly because of the influential factors named above.

All in all, the Pentop field test threw up a whole new series of questions. We are trying to look more closely at some of the aspects in a further test phase involving Belson interviews.

3. Belson interviews

The Belson approach was developed in 1960 by English media researcher William A. Belson, whose aim was to discover possible sources of errors in interviews and to develop a better method of questioning. His special research method consisted of carrying out a qualitatively intensive interview on the same day as the standard interview or on the day after.

The aim of using the Belson approach in our test was to find out more about the extent to which differences between Pentop and paper-pencil interviews in the responses to the use of print can be attributed to structural differences in the samples surveyed and the extent to which the respective questioning techniques are responsible for differences.

The structure of the test:

Overall, 120 survey participants were invited to attend double interviews. They were requested to come to the studio on two consecutive days, one interview being conducted using the paper-pencil method, the other using the Pentop method. For methodological reasons, half of the interviewees were interviewed firstly using the Pentop method and secondly using the paper-pencil method, the other half the other way around. The complete set of questions used in the media analysis were asked. Following the interview on the second test day, the differences between the two interviews of each individual were examined in the responses to the general filter, for the broadest audience and readers per issue. In an intensive interview session carried out by specially trained interviewers, we attempted to look into the reasons for the differences in responses and to find explanations. All intensive interviews were recorded monographically.

In these tests, the fact that the two interviews were carried out with the same person precludes any structural differences. With two exceptions, which initial analyses have proven to be attributable to external influences and not in any way linked with the methods used, any differences in responses which did arise were therefore attributable to the interviewing technique.

The first influential factor derives from the Belson approach itself:

The interview which has just taken place may in some circumstances cause the interviewee to subsequently consider their reading habits again. The second interview will then contain corresponding corrections. The striking point here is that these corrections generally relate to occasional reading outside the home (a typical example would be reading in a waiting room) which is forgotten in the first interview. In the second interview, therefore, there are larger numbers of occasional readers. Corresponding reasons for such differences were recorded in the intensive interview so that in further analyses these differences, which are not of relevance for the purpose of our tests, can be eliminated.

A second external influence which is not attributable to the method used lies in the overlap in the definitions of time for broadest audience and readers per issue. In some cases, the interviewees referred expressly to the fact that they did not see any difference between various intervals of time (e.g. "in the last 12 months" or "1 to 2 years ago"). As this trend is also observed in data concerning frequency of reading, this cannot be classed as a real difference between the two interviews. Here too, corrections can be made so that the differences, which are likewise irrelevant for the purpose of the tests, can be eliminated.

We are currently unable to report on detailed results as to date we have only a small number of results and, in view of the large quantity of material to be analysed, we will need more time until we can make any conclusive statements.

On the basis of the résumé of the Belson interviews, the committees of the AG.MA will certainly be giving serious thought to initiating further test phases.